TERESA URREA

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Teresa Urrea, also known as La Santa de Cabora, emerged as a prominent spiritual figure in Mexican history. Born on October 15, 1873 in Sinaloa, Mexico, Urrea's life began in a politically tumultuous period as President Diaz took oath into office. As governors were replaced and new leaders stepped in, indigenous people were threatened, and those who disagreed were exiled or murdered. As Urrea gained popularity among those she healed and spread religion to, the Mexican government sought to regain control of the country and banish Urrea and folk religion. Through the exploration of Urrea's physical being and symbolic presence, we can better understand the complexities of spirituality and the challenges the Latinx community face during transformative periods.

Teresa Urrea, illegitimate daughter of Cayetana Chanvez, a Tehuecan, and Don Tomas Urrea, a ranchero, showed her gifts at a young age. On October 15, 1873, in Sinaloa , Mexico, Urrea was born and lived in a ramada, or small hut, with her mother's family near Don Urrea's ranch. In 1885, Urrea was recognized as Tomas Urrea's daughter and began to live on the ranch, giving her a higher social status and the opportunity to meet the various cowboys and curanderas, or healer using folk remedies, in the community.[i] One local curandera, La Huila, became Urrea's mentor in 1889 and taught her herbal remedies to heal the sick. During her time with La Huila, Teresa Urrea began to practice healing patients in a trance like state that was noted to calm patients down while her mentor administered the medicines. As her time with Huila was nearing, Urrea became ill for three months with near-fatal bouts of seizures and catatonic states. It was

during this dark time where Urrea had a vision of the Virgin Mary where the promised to devote her energies to healing people as the Virgin Mary healed her. Once she recovered, she did exactly that and healed a well-known local, Rosario Bajo, from an unknown cardiovascular disease which led to her gaining notoriety at the national level as the popular press began to cover her miracles, giving her the name "La Santa de Cabora."[ii] Due to her popularity, religious gifts, and the title of Saint of Cabora", the Catholic church also began to monitor her as she quickly became the a symbol of religion for many. As the Diaz administration came into full effect, the Urrea's were exiled because they were seen as a threat to government as her practices countered the governments beliefs. Despite Urrea's exile, her name spread among the indigenous communities in Mexico and led to the creation of La Santa de Cabora as a symbol of resistance and liberation.[iii]

During the Tomochic Rebellion from 1891 to 1892, the rise of La Santa de Cabora as a symbol of resistance spread among the indigenous communities as their land and people were threatened. As President Diaz came into office, pro-Diaz community members and those in government positions, fought indigenous tribes as they worked to take their land. The Tomochiteco Indians, and other tribes, led uprisings shouting "Viva La Santa de Cabora" as a symbol that represented them not following government, only God.[iv] This phrase continued to be used throughout the various uprisings during the rebellion by surviving members and neighboring villages. Although Urrea's presence was felt symbolically through her given name as Santa de Cabora, and the belief that she was sparking their rebellions, there is not any evidence that Urrea or her family were directly involved.[v] Because of the threat that folk religion imposed on the governments' beliefs at the time, the Urrea's were forced to leave Mexico following the Secretary of War's threat to persecute indigenous people.[vi] Their plan to flee

Mexico was towards the middle of the uprisings, and therefore, were not directly linked to involvement within the war. It is at this moment where Teresa Urrea was seen as mystical, or religious being, instead of a physical healer. As Teresa Urrea fled Mexico and crossed into Arizona in 1892, her speculated political involvement continued as she tried to create a family of her own and avoid political accusations.

Although the Urrea's fled Mexico to avoid political turmoil, La Santa de Cabora continued to be linked to government reform despite her lack of involvement. Once Urrea was sent to Nogales, Arizona, she attempted to live a quiet life as political tensions in Mexico continued to rise. After four years of living in Arizona, Urrea's involvement in political reform was suspected after the Plan Restaurador de Constitucion y Refromista was drafted and published in the El Independiente newspaper. In this plan, they called for reform in Mexico, and many signed the plan, including Urrea's father, but her signature was not found. Because of her close connections to the reform, she was speculated to be involved and her family was forced to move to El Paso due to the political climate. While in El Paso, a customhouse was raided in Nogales, Arizona as a revolt against the Mexican government. During this uprising in 1896, Urrea's mystical name, La Santa de Cabora, resurfaced as a symbol of liberation despite her disconnect to the cause.[vii] This raid again, caused Urrea to move to Clifton, Arizona where she met, and briefly married, Lupe Rodriguez who was a local miner in Clifton.[viii] They were only married for twenty-four hours as Rodriguez attempted to coerce Urrea onto a train heading to Mexico by gun.[ix] Because of this, many suspected Rodriguez to be an agent of President Diaz as a way to get Urrea back into the possession of the Mexican government. Quickly after their failed marriage, businessmen Rosencranz and Shannon of Clifton, intrigued by Urrea's gift, planned a medical tour across the United States that began in September 1900 in San Francisco,

California.[x] Urrea signed a contract to earn $10,000 a year, however their plan fell apart shortly after they failed to pay Urrea and recognized her as a “theatrical curandera” instead of the serious healings she was performing. The medical tour regrouped with John Van Order as a translator, and they began traveling across the states starting in St. Louis, Missouri.[xi] Van Order and Urrea engaged in a relationship where they later had two daughters, Laura and Magdalena. Urrea’s constant struggle against her symbolic character and physical being followed her as she moved from Mexico to the states practicing her gifts.

As Urrea continued her life in the states and began raising her daughters, Urrea acknowledged the power her symbolic name held. After Urrea and Van Order had their two daughters, they moved to Los Angeles, California once Don Tomas, passed away. In 1903, the Union Federal Mexicanos was organized and Urrea rallied with the labor union due to her knowledge of the treatment of workers in mines. After recognizing the power of her symbolic name, Urrea spoke at labor sites and meetings to gain attention to the strikes. Unfortunately, the strikes were unsuccessful and Urrea focused more on healing the members of the community and care of her daughters as Van Order was often away.[xii] While in California, the family home burned down in a fire and forced Urrea to return to Clifton, Arizona to continue her promise to heal people. Urrea and Van Order quickly moved to San Jose Ranch in Arizona where Urrea spent her time giving back to the community through healing and helping the Mexican children with Spanish lessons. Towards the end of her life, Urrea tended to the women and children after a flood nearly destroyed Clifton causing her to contract an illness from the constant exposure to water. As her health continued to decline, she ensured that her daughters were in the custody of her lifelong friend. On January 12, 1902, at thirty-three years old, Teresa Urrea passed away at her family home and nearly four hundred people attended the funeral. As a continuation of

Urrea's dedication to healing the wounded and sick, her family home was donated and turned into a local hospital allowing her legacy to spread to the following generations.[xiii]

Almost eighty years later, in Clifton, Arizona, the mining strike resurrected the importance of Urrea. Elders in the town sought to remember Urrea as a healer and mender of communities and used her name to bring the city back together. In 1994 the town had a fiesta in her honor as she could heal fractured communities.[xiv] They honored her curandera lifestyle that healed and cared for those who were sick and wounded through natural medicine and trance-like states despite the government beliefs. La Santa de Cabora left a lasting impact as indigenous communities, and towns who witnessed her miracles, continued to spread her story of compassion and rebellion to their families. Urrea's struggle between distancing and acknowledging the power La Santa de Cabora held as a symbol of rebellion demonstrates the struggle of identity in the Latinx community during politically charged periods where identity and spirituality are constantly questioned.

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[i] William Holden, *Teresita* (Owings Mills, Md.: Stemmer House Publishers, 1978), 7-13.
[ii] Marian Perales, "Teresa Urrea: Curandera and Folk Saint," *Latina Legacies: Identity, Biography, and Community* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 100-103.
[iii] Holden, Teresita, 14. and Paul Vanderwood, *The Power of Gods Against the Guns of Government: Religious Upheaval in Mexico at the turn of the Nineteenth Century* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), 160.
[iv] Vanderwood, *The Power of Gods Against the Guns of Government: Religious Upheaval in Mexico at the turn of the Nineteenth Century,* 15-16.
[v] William Whitlock, *Santa Teresa: Tales from Town Topics (*Town Topics Publishing Company, 1900), 99.
[vi] Perales, "Teresa Urrea: Curandera and Folk Saint," 106-108.
[vii] *The Salt Lake Herald,* August 23, 1896.
[viii] "Teresa Urrea," Arizona, U.S., County Marriage Records, 1865- 1972, Ancestry, accessed November 2, 2023. https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/discoveryui-content/view/900518832:60873
[ix] *The Copper Era,* June 28, 1900.
[x] *The Evening News,* September 11, 1900.
[xi] Perales, "Teresa Urrea: Curandera and Folk Saint," 112-113.
[xii] Perales, "Teresa Urrea: Curandera and Folk Saint," 114.
[xiii] Perales, "Teresa Urrea: Curandera and Folk Saint," 115.
[xiv] Perales, "Teresa Urrea: Curandera and Folk Saint," 117.