

“Coinage for Caring: Capitalism, Christmas, and Día de los Muertos”

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The typical exhibition of ‘care’ in Western—specifically American—culture finds itself on a commercialized, consumerist version of the term that is theoretically communicated through objects and paid patronage and, thus, determines the level of care we possess for an individual or a culture. Culture, specifically the Mexican culture displayed in Día de los Muertos celebrations, has been commodified in territories above the border to exchange tradition for profit; Americans have shrunken this pillar of Mexican heritage into a tangible, cheapened symbol: most non-Mexican peoples’ display of ‘care’ for this holiday extends only to the purchase of a mass-produced object that can be bought and sold. My literary journalism piece structures similarities between the Americanized versions of Día de los Muertos and Christmas. My piece communicates the history behind Día de los Muertos, as well as the commercial history of Christmas, to offer alternative celebratory techniques and methods of displaying care, respect, and consideration without appropriating or misattributing culture-centric practices and symbols. To illustrate my alternatives to the Western display of care in the holiday season, and extend this consideration to all holidays, I introduce an interview with a Día de los Muertos celebrator who communicates her dissatisfaction with the misconception revolving around the holiday and a PBS News article, “Family Time is Number-One as Millennial Parents get Ready for the Holiday, According to Survey from PBS KIDS,” that illustrates young peoples’ strive to alleviate and restructure society’s habitual gift-giving at holiday time.

My argument, that addresses the Americanized version of two holidays, is founded upon select Millennials’ viewpoints on Mexican heritage and culture, Regina M. Marchi’s explanation of the historical revision of modern day Día de los Muertos, and Leigh Schmidt’s succinct explanation of the gradual commercialism and consumerism that has claimed Christmas. By acquainting my audience with these viewpoints, I introduce alternative acts of caring that contradict the carefully constructed Westernized displays of consumerism: appreciation and knowledge of tradition and heritage and offering of meaningful, humanized gifts.