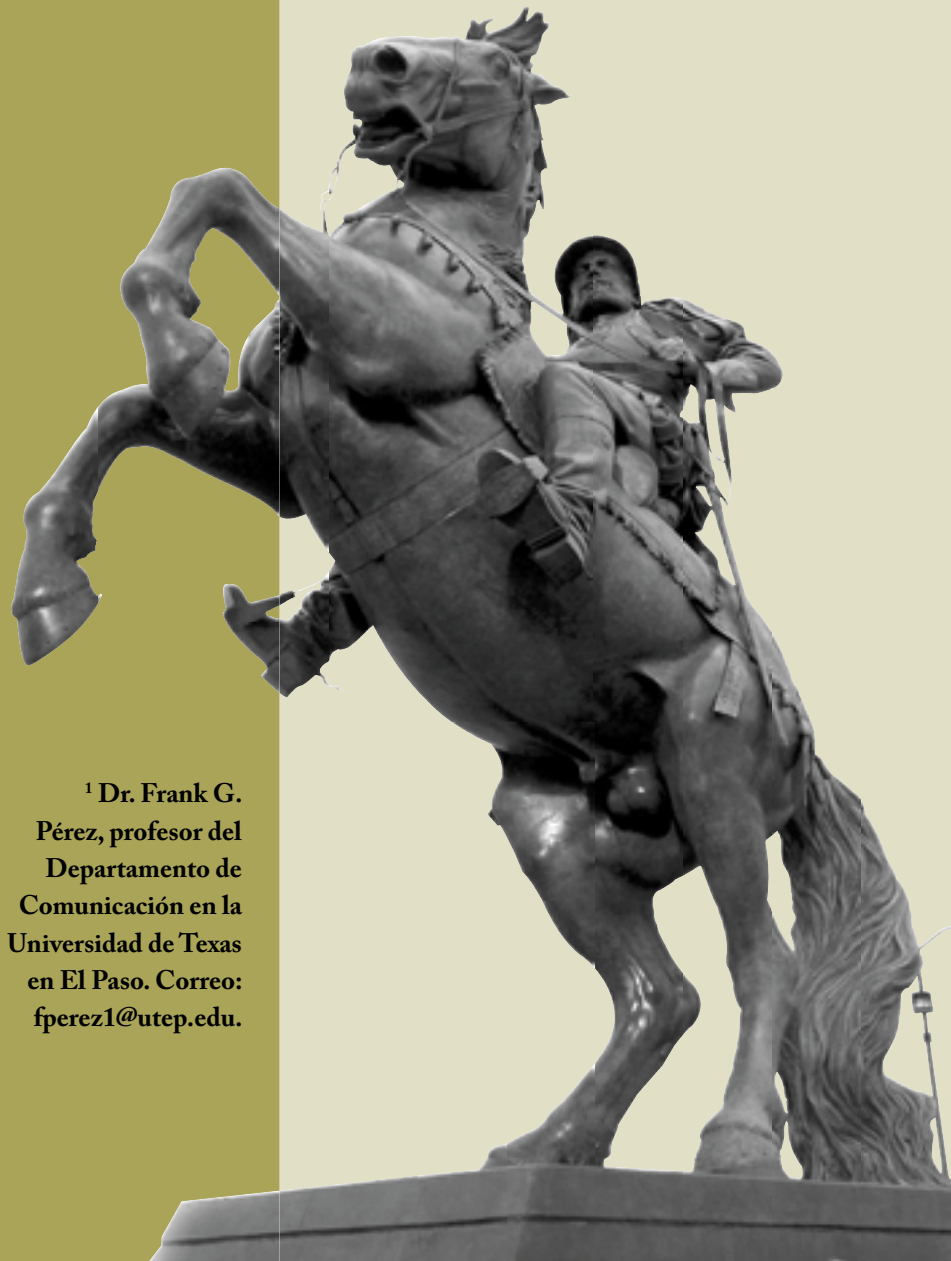


**Mensaje para
la Justicia
Social:**

Juan de Oñate y la lucha por la representación cultural chicana en el arte público

Frank G. Pérez¹



¹ Dr. Frank G. Pérez, profesor del Departamento de Comunicación en la Universidad de Texas en El Paso. Correo: fperez1@utep.edu.

Identity is forged in the cultural spaces of everyday life, inside the emerging map of the city. Social justice demands spatial justice.

Jim Ferrell²

Introduction

Conflict is an inherent part of the public art process. Efforts to unite 1,000s of people along a common understanding of any subject selected to beautify a location are problematic, at best. When those directly involved with the selection and funding of such endeavors ignore their constituents, conflict often arises. This essay provides a case study of such a happening. It examines the civic discourse surrounding a recently installed, 40-foot tall statue of failed colonizer Juan de Oñate outside the El Paso International Airport with a focus on race and social class issues. El Paso's population is predominantly of Mexican descent and working class, most of the statue's supporters are White and middle to upper-middle class. These differences allow for the analysis of the discourse along lines of race and class.

The essay provides a brief overview of Oñate's role in Southwest history and the evolution of the XII Travelers Memorial of the Southwest (hereafter Travelers), the cornerstone of which is the Oñate statue. It then provides a three-tiered social justice framework as the vehicle for the analysis of this project. Research questions that examine how resources are distributed (distributive justice), how social networks operate in the selection process (associative justice), and how ethnic history is framed (cultural justice) will be addressed. The essay, part of a larger research agenda (Pérez & Ortega, 2006; Pérez & Ruggiero, in press), concludes with suggested strategies that may have lessened the conflict. These suggestions have implications in a number of public art controversies and transcend the case of study. They should serve other communities that face similar encounters.

² Source: Ferrell (2001), p. 177.

The Spanish Legacy in the Southwest

The history of far West Texas and New Mexico is filled with a long series of colonial Spanish incursions into indigenous territory and subsequent conflict between the colonists and Natives. In April 1598, Mexican-born Juan de Oñate and a colonizing party of 400 people arrived at the Río Grande in present-day San Elizario, Texas, (Mirandé & Enríquez, 1979) east of contemporary El Paso. There Oñate and his party met Manso Indians, the name was given to them by the colonizers, and held a celebration of thanksgiving and read a proclamation, *La Toma* (literally “the taking”), that claimed the region for the Spanish Crown (Kessell, 2002).

When Oñate’s party reached what is now known as northern New Mexico that June, they subjugated the Pueblo peoples under Spanish rule, occupying their houses and refusing to work (Weber, 1992). In the winter of 1598, the Acoma people rebelled, killing 11 soldiers under Oñate’s command, including his nephew, Juan de Zaldívar. In a three-day battle, 72 Spaniards destroyed the Pueblo, murdering 500 Acoma men as well as 300 Acoma women and children (Weber, 1992). After the battle, 80 men and 500 women and children were placed on trial. Those between the ages of 12 and 25 were forced into indentured servitude. The Spaniards severed one foot of each male over 25 years of age (Hammond & Rey, 1953a). Children under 12 were taken from their families and sent to México (Hammond & Rey, 1953a, Weber, 1992). These actions were meant to intimidate other indigenous peoples into submission to Spanish rule (Rabasa, 2000).

When reports of Oñate’s excessive cruelty reached Mexico City, he was ordered to stand trial. Found guilty of cruel “abuses against Indians; ill-treatment of some of his own officers, colonists, and priests; and adultery” (Weber, 1992: 86), Oñate was permanently banished from New Mexico. He left for Spain, arrived there a failure, and died as a mining inspector (Weber, 1992). Despite Oñate’s well-documented violence against both Indians and his fellow colonists, his representation remains at the center of questions about ethnic and regional identity in the region. Although no image or likeness of Oñate is

known to exist, he was selected as the cornerstone statue of the XII Travelers project. Installed in October 2006, and officially unveiled six months later, the statue has divided El Paso for 19 years.

The Origins of the XII Travelers in Contemporary El Paso

In early 1988, sculptor John Houser approached the City of El Paso with the concept to build 12 statues of individuals historically important to the surrounding area. Houser was influenced by a 1947 calendar of a similar theme and earlier attempts to promote the concept that dated from 1915 (XII Travelers, 1990a).³ In June, city officials accepted Houser's proposal and agreed to set aside \$1 million toward the completion of the sculptures (Jauregui, 1992). Houser's proposal stated that he and his supporters would independently raise an additional \$2.7 million dollars to fund the Travelers initiative (Olvera, 1990).

The city's acceptance of the project initially caused concern among some in the community because of allegations that alternative proposals were not solicited, and because of what some viewed as Houser's questionable standing in the art community. The allegations were never proven or disproven; my research indicates they eventually lost the media's interest and forgotten. The criticism against Houser stemmed from the University of Arizona's initial reluctance to install one of his statues on its campus (see Ligon, 1990). Critics stated that Houser's supporters (e.g., Storey-Gore, 1990) misrepresented him as a world-renowned artist because of this and other failures (see Pérez & Ortega, 2006). When the first Travelers' statue of Fray García was installed, it raised little concern or reaction.

However, the Oñate statue, second in the series of 12 proposed Traveler statues, triggered very strong reactions. The Oñate statue thus symbolizes a troubled historical past and a troubling present for the El Paso community. While the statue glorifies Oñate as a hero, many

³ In keeping with González's (1998) concept of "speaking secrets" that holds individuals accountable for their actions, authors of any newspaper or Internet source are cited in text by name.

in the community, especially indigenous people and Chicanos or politicized Mexican Americans, castigate him as a colonizing criminal (e.g., Chacón, 1990; Martínez, 2001; Romo, 1990a, 1990b). Protests against the statue led to it being renamed *The Equestrian* by the City in 2003 (Flynn, 2003: A1). As I will argue in the remainder of this essay, a large part of the conflict surrounding the statue could have been avoided, had civic leaders adopted a social justice approach to address critics' concerns. Instead, civic leaders, particularly those most closely associated with the project, largely ignored critics concerns.

A Pluralistic Framework of Social Justice

Social justice refers to “a concern with the principles and norms of social organization and relationships necessary to achieve, and act upon, equal consideration of all people in their commonalities and differences” (Gerwitz & Cribb, 2002: 502). Traditional approaches to social justice typically begin with a deliberation on human rights and subsequently create or propose ways to improve them within a legal framework (Kobayashi & Ray, 2000). Yet, the theorization of social justice as a multifaceted construct allows one to conceptualize social justice issues from a *pluralist perspective* (Gerwitz & Cribb, 2002), where social justice is argued to represent at least three social facets or levels. *Distributive justice* addresses the economic principles used to allocate resources in society. It is particularly relevant wherever a privileged group uses its access to material resources and capital to maintain its status over others. *Cultural justice* addresses issues of intellectual domination. It questions, for example, when a privileged group ignores another group's calls for cultural sensitivity. Finally, *associational justice* relates to the (in)ability of previously marginalized groups to participate fully in the decision making process because of (pre)existing social relationships (Gerwitz & Cribb, 2002). An example can be provided when artists of color struggle to justify their work for inclusion in prestigious social spaces against criticism that it is primitive or lacking in comparison to traditional Western art (Gaspar de Alba, 1998; West, 1999).

A pluralist perspective of social justice has three important implications for the study of social justice and public art. First, it expands the scope of traditional social rights models of justice to include facets that may normally fall beyond the compass of social justice. Legal frameworks, the typical focus of social justice research, conventionally limit who is and is not affected by social injustice situations (Brodsky & Day, 1989; 148, cited in Kobayashi & Ray, 2000). Next, it forces us to accept that tension may develop between various facets of any particular social justice movement. For example, some statue critics may have been content with the name change; others may have wanted a more radical solution, such as demolishing the statue. Finally, a pluralist social justice perspective “collapses” the distinction between evaluation and action (Gewirtz & Cribb, 2002: 501) by providing a suggested resolution that can be easily adopted by those advocating social justice.

Of primary concern within each of these three levels of social justice is the role played by privileged individuals and groups. Goodman (2001: 30) explains that those in privileged groups often display: (a) a lack of consciousness of their own dominant identity and its benefits to them, (b) a denial that oppression exists in society and a tendency to avoid addressing it, and (c) a sense of *internalized superiority* or a sense of “entitlement” that leads those in privileged groups to expect favored treatment over others. In short, *privileged groups* benefit from “unequal power relationships that allow one group to benefit at the expense of another group” (Goodman, 2001: 6).

An example of this entitlement includes the ability privileged groups have to voice their views with little concern for other viewpoints. The views and actions of privileged groups and non-privileged groups are analyzed through the pluralistic social justice framework above via a rhetorical analysis of phenomena related to the Juan de Oñate / Equestrian statue. My construction of pluralist social justice is also influenced by the view that:

a “politics of difference” means promoting a concept of social justice that provides a place for everyone within our society, by transcending the normative mechanisms

that define difference as inherently perverse and by providing a means to resist the power of dominant groups to direct civil society from a privileged centre. (Kabayashi & Ray, 2000: electronic version)

Kabayashi and Ray's (2000) statement above addressed the two fundamental points of much social justice research: (a) social justice dynamics exist at multiple levels and (b) privileged individuals and groups eclipse the interests of others.

The goal of this essay, then, is to shed light on how abuse of power, a lack of privileged group cultural sensitivity, and a deficit of shared dialogue can lead to social injustice in the selection of public art in a predominantly Mexican descent or Chicano community. Using the framework above I will address how the selection and installation of this statue reflects the controversial nature and power dynamics common to most public art endeavors. The framework serves to reveal the identity concerns (e.g., Gaspar de Alba, 1998; Hutchinson, 2002; West, 1999) and power struggles (Levine, 2002) that typically ensue in the selection and installation of public art. This case study will focus on distributive, cultural, and associational justice to examine a broader social justice paradigm in relation to public art. Consideration will be given to the various tensions within and among the groups arguing for and against the XII Travelers and its centerpiece, the Juan de Oñate / Equestrian statue. The theoretical framework explores issues of access to community decision-making based on the three levels of social justice.

Distributive justice includes having access to revenue or the ability to raise capital more easily than other groups (Goodman, 2001). Another example relates to the ability of one social segment to offer or withhold jobs to various social segments or communities (e.g., Bourgois, 2003). This level of distribution reflects many hegemonic biases and strategies for operation. Issues of associational justice reflect the authority of a privileged group to participate in community decision-making processes more easily than other groups. Those with greater access to decision making are most often cultural and economic elites (Goodman, 2001; Levine, 2002), many of whom hold mainstream (i.e.,

eurocentric) views of history and art (Blaut, 1993; Frank, 1998; Gaspar de Alba, 1998; Said, 1978, 1993). Such categories of people typically have greater associational privilege than do others (Acuña, 1996, 1998, 2003; Blackwell, Kwoh, & Pastor, 2002; Hero, 1992, 2000). Cultural justice issues are addressed in terms of ethnic representation in public art. Privileged positions in the U.S. typically invoke an ethnic bias that favors and represents the experiences of (Neo)Europeans (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Omi & Winant, 1994), particularly White heterosexual males (Dyer, 2002), over any other social category. As Hutchinson (2002: 443) convincingly argues, public art projects are enmeshed in an “ideological tangle of who they are for and why they were made.” Thus, three research questions will be addressed to provide insights into the public art process:

RQ1: What is the role of distributive justice in the selection of the Juan de Oñate statue?

RQ2: What is the role of associative justice in the selection of the Juan de Oñate statue?

RQ3: What is the role of cultural justice in the selection of the Juan de Oñate statue?

Distributive Justice: Tax Increment Financing or Who Pays for Public Art?

RQ1 addressed the role of economic distribution in the public art project of study. Analysis of the Oñate statue reveals a distinct lack of distributive justice in relation to the Oñate statue vis-à-vis various sections of the El Paso community. In the early 1990s, El Paso Mayor Suzy Azar initially supported the Travelers as part of her administration’s downtown revitalization initiative. Funding for the project came from a downtown improvement entity known as the Tax Increment Financing Board (TIF) (Pérez & Ruggiero, in press), which promoted joint public and private investment in downtown redevelopment. TIFs represent an increasingly common funding structure for community revitalization projects (Turner, 2002), but while public funds form the bulk of public art project financing, the decision-making process remains in the hands of the political and economic elite.

When the Travelers project began, the 12 sculptures were to be installed throughout the 88-block downtown TIF district (Olvera, 1990). In 1992, the city approved the first phase of the project and partially funded the creation of the first two statues in the amount of \$275,000. However, Houser's project was allegedly the only project considered for municipal funding. The city issued no calls for proposals, effectively barring other projects from consideration (Olvera, 1990). Critics of the program voiced concern because other artists were denied the opportunity to compete for city project funding.

Houser's early XII Travelers proposal included provisions to create a foundry and art studio downtown, according to David Holguin, of the city's Office for Economic Development (Olvera, 1990). The goal for the foundry and studio was to "create jobs [in] and function as a tourist attraction" (Holguin, cited in Olvera, 1990: B2) for the downtown area. Houser claimed the revision was a poorly titled "shorter version of the original" (Olvera, 1990: B3) and insisted, "We [Houser and his supporters] intend to live up to the original concept" (Olvera, 1990: B3), implying that the foundry and studio would be built as part of the project.

Despite Houser's promises, Holguin's committee recommended the mayor, city council, and TIF board reevaluate the Travelers' eligibility for TIF funds without the foundry and art studio. Despite these concerns, the project was approved. The mayor and city council then organized a committee of local business leaders and members of the art community to identify 12 historical figures important in local or regional history (Metz, 2001). The first figure selected was Fray García de San Francisco, a missionary credited with the introduction of Catholicism to the area. It was installed in 1996 with little public concern (Houser, 1996; Flynn, 1996).

The Oñate statue, however, was controversial and some suggested changing its name, including City Representative Jan Sumrall in 1999. City Representative Anthony Cobos suggested the same in 2001. The idea failed to garner support because, according to Oñate supporters, to rename the statue opened the Travelers project and the city to potential lawsuits from donors who contributed money for a statue of Juan

de Oñate and not an anonymous Spanish conquistador (Shubinski & Garber, 2001). This “legal” interpretation reflects an abuse of power on the part of the statue supporters, many of whom used their access to economic resources and the mass media to frighten the city council, which eventually reversed its position.

Yet, in late 2003, the city council voted 4-3 to rename the statue “The Equestrian” and to fund the “struggling” project an additional \$713,000 (Wilson, 2003: A1). The change of name was triggered by the continued controversy surrounding the statue that included protesters in front of city hall (Wilson, 2003) and was followed by an announcement that the city, unable to fund the project to completion, accepted a proposal that would move “The Equestrian” to the El Paso International Airport (Editorial Board, 2003; Wilson, 2003). Three years after citing fears of a lawsuit, the Oñate / Equestrian statue supporters agreed to the name change in order to see the statue through to completion. The statue supporters neither addressed concerns about a lawsuit nor did the local media raise questions of the name change’s legality, although the media had reported such legal concerns two years previously. The statue’s newest proposed location also violated the terms of the TIF that partially funded the statue’s completion, a pointed missed by El Paso’s political, media, and local elites.

The Oñate / Equestrian statue was completed in a Mexico City foundry (Thompson, 2002) with the final assembly of the sculpture to take place in New Mexico (Wilson, 2003). The statue’s final cost exceeded \$2 million⁴ and workers outside El Paso earned the majority of those funds. Even the sculptor, John Houser, lived in Santa Fe by the time of the statue’s completion. Yet, the statue would have created jobs for working class and artisan employees under the TIF plan (Olvera, 1990). Taxpayer monies that funded the statue’s completion were distributed to another nation and a neighboring state. Those elites who

⁴ This figure is a conservative estimate since Wilson (2003) reported the Travelers Committee raised \$1.25 million and the city’s award totaled \$713,000 in November 2003 alone. Other amounts of funding were awarded to the project throughout its 18-year history.

have supported the project have effectively denied working class and artisan El Pasoans from any share of the tax-based infusions of money generated by the construction of the Oñate / Equestrian statue.

Overall, the statue's continued funding throughout the past 16 years illustrates distributive justice issues in two ways. First, the statue's supporters have managed to secure funding for an as yet uncompleted public art project that has cost the city \$100,000s of its \$2 million price (see Wilson, 2003). These funds were distributed out of the local community. Furthermore, there has been much public outcry condemning the sculpture (e.g., Martínez, 2001; Romo, 1990a, 1990b; Wilson, 2003) throughout its various states of development. For example, State Representative Norma Chávez asked the city council to terminate the project (Wilson, 2003). Despite these and numerous other petitions, the project continues to receive economic support from city government. This situation suggests an unjust situation with a handful of civic and business leaders forcing their agenda for the project at the city's expense. Negotiations in the process of distributive justice were dynamic. Eventually, non-privileged groups forced their concerns to the public level. However, they were often dismissed, as evidenced by the distribution of funds to complete the statue. Privileged group's assessments of public art held sway in most local media (Perez & Ruggiero, in press). The statue continues to be promoted as a community-based public art project.

Associative Justice: Media Access and Support

The second research question addressed issues of privileged group associations and their role in the public art process. Two aspects of associative justice were analyzed concerning the Oñate statue as public art. First, media access is an important component of associational privilege because media content influences societal perceptions, particularly in terms of cultural framing (Chen, 1991; Kellner, 1995, 2003) and relative importance of an issue (McCombs & Reynolds, 2002). Similarly, local media influence community perceptions of public art. Given that the city of study has only one daily newspaper, like most

metropolitan areas throughout the U.S (Bagdikian, 1999), the association between people in privileged groups and the print media is particularly important.

In this case, the *El Paso Times* editorially supported the Oñate statue; thus, little press attention was given to the concerns of those who oppose it. Four principal groups were found to have a relatively strong ability to shape the mediated discourse surrounding the Oñate / Equestrian statue: (a) columnists for the *El Paso Times*, at least one of whom is on the Travelers Committee, (b) honorary members of the Travelers Committee, (c) and local politicians. Although it may seem redundant to state that *El Paso Times* columnists have associative links to their employer; however, this point is particularly significant because the *Times* Editorial Board (1992, 1997, 2003) supports the Travelers.

This support is evident in the views expressed by several *Times* columnists. Sports Editor Joe Muench (1998: 13) wrote a column addressing the idea that Oñate's expedition party was heading to San Antonio, Texas, not Santa Fe: "Don [Oñate] wanted his ancestors [sic] to have an NBA team and a big fish aquarium" (emphasis added). *Times* Columnist and local writer of popular history Leon Metz (1997: A6) defended the project by referring to its critics as "naysayers" [sic] dancing around "sacrificial fires." Such framing of the issue aims to steer public attention to support the Oñate / Equestrian statue. The Travelers committee receives associative benefits from Metz's standing as a regular columnist for the *El Paso Times*.

The courtesy appointments of several Mexican and U.S. elites constituted another important aspect of associative justice. Early on, the Travelers Committee invited people such as Laura W. Bush, then "First Lady of the State of Texas" (XII Travelers, n.d.), to serve on their honorary board. Other honorary members included local business leaders, civic leaders, and "Direct descendent of Don Juan de Oñate Manuel Gullon y de Oñate" (XII Travelers, n.d.).

These associations simultaneously add a degree of credibility to the project, particularly among those with a mainstream orientation. They embed the Travelers project within an elite group of business, cultural,

and political leaders. Regrettably, non-elites are absent from the committee. For example, a XII Travelers committee letter of solicitation, dated October 27, 1995, includes a list of 2 local elite along its left border. These people are listed with such titles as “Historian, Author, Professor Emeritus” and “Cultural Leader”. Curiously, this letter also lists four people with the title “Dr.”, the person’s name, and “Ph.D.” (e.g., Dr. Wilbert H. Timmons, Ph.D.). The redundant use of titles breaks with established protocol that lists a person as either “Dr.” or with their name, followed by “Ph.D.” It also attempts to reinforce the credibility of people with such credentials, particularly with those who may be unfamiliar with such titles.

The apparent goal of the honorary board is to lend credibility to the Travelers project. Yet there is an absolute absence of associative justice in relation to this strategy. The honorary board consists of privileged individuals who represent various privileged social groups. Furthermore, the honorary board serves to present an image of community support from cultural experts. Equally qualified critics have exercised their voice against the project (e.g., State Rep. Norma Chávez; History Professor Oscar J. Martínez), but have been typically ignored. The board’s association with its mainstream supporters is more often addressed in local media. This media bias is also likely influenced by the associative links that exist between Travelers committee members and the *El Paso Times*.

Associative justice is a crucial area in the analysis of social justice because of the synergistic tendencies that elite groups have, particularly in terms of race and economic well being (Blackwell *et al.* 2002; Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Dyer, 2002). In El Paso, various city councils and mayors supported a project that is culturally offensive to many people in the community. The ability of the Travelers committee to associate itself with the only daily paper in the area, a paper whose editorial board supports the project (e.g. Editorial Board, 1992, 1997, 2003), is beneficial to the statue supporters. The *Times*’ columnists garner a large amount of editorial space to use in support of the statue. These same columnists also benefit from credibility ascribed to columnists who write regularly for the newspaper. Thus, media professionals’ in-

volvement with the XII Travelers public art project benefits them, as well as local and regional elites who allow themselves to be associated with the project. These types of associations create the impression that the Oñate / Equestrian statue is an important and publicly sanctioned project. These types of associations with elites fail to address the cultural issues that concern the statue's critics. Most importantly, these types of associations deny voice to those who oppose the statue.

Cultural Justice: Physical and Symbolic Racism

The final research question examined the representation of ethnicity vis-à-vis the statue. Cultural domination is a common phenomenon in Western culture (Córdova, 1998; Said, 1978) that typically frames various elements in a eurocentric manner (Blaut, 1993; Dussel, 1998; Shohat & Stam, 1994). The Oñate / Equestrian statue physically and symbolically overshadows the cultural contributions of the indigenous peoples of the area. The other proposed statues are to be approximately 14-foot tall, less than half the 40-foot height of the centerpiece statue. The height disparity suggests that the contributions of other historical figures were less important. Furthermore, it also suggests that Oñate is worthy of such civic accolades and ignores his brutality against the Pueblos. He is more important to northern New Mexico because a majority of his activities were carried out in that region, most notably the battle at Acoma and the subsequent amputation of one foot from each Pueblo male over the age of 25 (Hammond & Rey, 1953a, 1953b; Kessell, 2002; Weber, 1992). From a cultural standpoint, many New Mexicans embrace the *Spanish* elements of their past and ignore their indigenous ancestors (McWilliams, 1990, Montgomery, 1999), despite the fact that Oñate's wife was the granddaughter of Córtez and the great-granddaughter of Mocecuhzoma (Mirandé & Enríquez, 1979). Such is not the case in El Paso, where many people embrace their Mexican roots (see Vila, 2000, 2005).

The design of the sculpture frames Oñate as a noble individual, suggesting that the failed colonizer (Rabasa, 2000; Weber, 1992) deserves the civic tribute a 40-foot statue implies. Although no record

exists of Oñate's physical appearance, the statue's face was developed from a bust of Manuel Gullón y de Oñate, a descent of Juan de Oñate (XII Travelers, 2001) who visited El Paso during a First Thanksgiving festival in 1989 (Farley-Villalobos, 1989). The sculpture's facial characteristics (e.g., long, thin nose) make it clear that Oñate is not to be mistaken with a Mexican or *mestizo*, a person of Indian and Spanish blood (Acuña, 2003; García, 1997).

One side of Oñate's helmet features the image of a crucified Christ with a kneeling Spaniard at his feet. The use of religious iconography is symbolic of the role the Roman Catholic Church played in the colonial project and serves two purposes. It represents the conquering of the Mexican Indians through Catholicism and it also places Oñate within the graces of the Church. The use of this iconography amplifies the myth of Oñate as an explorer concerned with "Christian" values. However, Oñate's primary concern was economic. Mining equipment was among the tools his colonizing party brought with them to northern New Mexico (Kessell, 2002). Although Catholicism was forced upon the indigenous populations of the Southwest, it remains a central cultural element in contemporary Chicana/o communities (e.g., Medina, 1998). Most problematic in Houser's helmet design is the link between the religion that subjugated the indigenous peoples and its suggestion of spirituality. For this reason, it is likely that many individuals who notice this element will be influenced to view Oñate as a religious or pious individual.

Furthermore, Oñate's right arm is extended skyward and he holds a scroll in his hand. The scroll represents the *toma*, a document used in the colonial process of land acquisition. The name for this "legal" document literally translates as the word "take" and represents the colonial perspective that legal written documents determined legitimate ownership of colonial territory. The colonial perspective argued that the indigenous peoples of the New World, and other colonized regions, such as Africa, lacked the concept of private property or written law; as such, they were unfit to govern themselves or to have dominion over their native lands (Blaut, 1993).

This erroneous view was also substantiated through the myth that

indigenous peoples were nomads and had no concept of private property. These ideas were a cornerstone of the ideological rationalizations for European conquest over non-Europeans in the colonial period (Blaut, 1993). The scroll is also representative of Oñate's status as an *adelantado*, a colonizer authorized by the Spanish Crown to conquer foreign lands (Mirandé & Enríquez, 1979). This standing secured Oñate's legal claim to discoveries in what is now New Mexico. The rush to create a memorial that will theoretically lure people to the downtown area also raises questions about the priority the city council and mayor placed on economics over cultural concerns. Particularly when economic development has been found to work well community involvement and cultural concerns (Hou & Ríos, 2003; Visser, 2001).

Cultural insensitivity is a criticism of the statue's height. Sculptor John Houser rejects such criticisms, claiming that size is an artistic aesthetic (Thompson, 2002). Yet, the Oñate / Equestrian statue dwarfs much of its surroundings. Furthermore, the sculpture works to promote a eurocentric view of Southwest history. The XII Travelers Committee's refusal to take seriously the concerns of Oñate's critics illustrates the limited ability non-elites have to voice their concerns for cultural representation of their own ethnic group—in a city where they are a numerical majority. After 17 years of protest, the city continuously funded the project and local Oñate apologists continued to insist the statue be completed. Such Oñate / Equestrian supporters openly display their lack of respect for the concerns of those who view the project as a racist symbol. Traveler committee member Sandra Braham voiced one example of this cultural insensitivity in response to the statue's name change, "It's [the name change] like saying Columbus didn't discover America" (Wilson, 2003: A1). Such a view ignores the multitudes of indigenous people who occupied the Americans prior to European exploration and conquest. Similarly, the focus on Oñate's failed exploits in the region dismisses the long-standing indigenous civilizations that were in the area prior to (neo)European encroachment.

Conceptualizing Social Justice and Culturally-Sensitive Public Art

The essay's objectives have been two-fold. First, it discussed how those with economic resources, political power, and media access influenced the statue's selection and installation as public art in El Paso. Next, it illustrated how the Oñate statue is a culturally insensitive work that ostracizes the Chicano community and other critics from the arena of public art. This situation is problematic because, as Hutchinson (2002: 435) argues, "Art practice that disempowers in the name of empowerment is a form of bad totality."

Artistic representations have social impact and the increased importance of people of color requires that public art reflect multicultural values, particularly when it is funded or partially funded by government entities. Public art helps shape local understanding for residents and tourists; as such, scholars should investigate the impact of such projects on the social milieu. Indeed, public art is political at myriad levels (Hutchinson, 2002; West, 1999). Those funding the project have a great deal of influence while those lacking economic and cultural capital typically have less. Thus, abuses of power occur when a public art project, installed at the behest of a few powerful privileged groups, is installed in a community that does not support it.

Concern for distributive, associative, and cultural elements should be of particular concern when public art is selected and installed by privileged individuals, because they often fail to understand how their status influences their worldview in relationship to the non-privileged numerical majority (Goodman, 2001). In the Southwest, for example, public art should not be offensive to the Mexican / Chicano and indigenous communities. The region's peoples are largely Native and/or Mexican-descended and Mexican populations. This analysis illustrates the eurocentric perspective reflected in the Travelers project, particularly the Oñate / Equestrian statue, and provides the locus for a push toward more thorough representation of people of color in the historical record.

Breaching local traditions and community tastes, celebrating its status as colonizer, boasting of an imagined past, the colossal Oñate

/ Equestrian statue proclaims its otherness. But public art not only occupies public space; it also makes some claim to represent the community where it is installed, producing an image of the public that is then broadcast to the world and future generations. The Oñate/Equestrian statue not only stands in a public space and gathers its support from public funds: it comes to stand for the public of El Paso.

Conclusion

Using the previous critical analysis as a guide, I offer three recommendations to those engaged in or planning to enter into a public art project. First, public art sensitive to cultural diversity should contextualize the events that shaped a place, avoiding fantasy heritage representations to do it. Second, public art sensitive to cultural diversity should reveal social conflicts in the city, not repress them; it should create art works that illuminate and explicate conflict and points of dynamic change. Third, the opportunity to create a public art project aimed at increasing tourism and economic development for an economically depressed area should incorporate the voices of all residents who voice interest. As evidenced by Visser's (2001) study of a Tygerberg, a post-apartheid African city, and Hou and Ríos' (2003) study of San Francisco's Union Point Park, economic development that is coupled with cultural sensitivity and large amounts of community input improves social, as well as economic development. Only when all voices are included can a project such as this and others like it truly be public art.

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