

Milagro Arroyo

12/07/2021

Thesis Statement: “*Mancha de Plátano*”

*Mancha de Plátano* is a research and design-based project in which I go through the history of Puerto Rican culture, which many people do not learn through the US education system. This history is extremely important to the US and is barely recognized. My thesis focuses on the history of Puerto Rico through tattoo designs, something I am completely new in. The theme of *Mancha de Plátano*, or '*plantain stain*,' focuses on a common Puerto Rican saying about embracing identity. I hope to teach and encourage curiosity about the history of Puerto Rico. Throughout this thesis, I have read many historical books starting from the native Tainos to the present day. I first started with the Taino portion, learning about the myths, daily life, and how they might have used jagua, a natural black dye, to paint their skin. I reference it throughout the book through the use of black and red colors. Red relates to the use of achiote, another natural dye. After discussing Taino history, I examined the Spanish Colonization period and the encomienda system. My designs focus on the meeting of Tainos with the Spanish and the plantations and slavery that come after. The third chapter summarizes a brief history of how Puerto Rico became a Commonwealth and how these decisions affected the Puerto Rican people. I made reference to people like Pedro Albizu Campos, an important historical figure and a fighter for the independence of the Island. I made designs referencing the Foraker and Jones Act. These designs reference sailor tattoos as symbols of Americanization. I also designed a tattoo based on the untold histories of Puerto Rico. Finally, the present-day section speaks on the current political, environmental, and economic issues. The young jíbaro design represents the rebirth of strong culture through recent activism by the new generations. This is supposed to be a positive note in which, despite the pain we have faced, we are still strong. I take inspiration from songs like “Hijos del Cañaveral” by Residente. The historical research connects to the tattoo designs I create. This is related to the title of the book. Creating the designs in black and red, like using jagua and achiote, I am able to connect the pieces to a linear history of body art within Puerto Rican culture. I also tie in the chaotic beginnings and rich history of Puerto Rico. I want the viewer to find elements of the past in the present and how these things still directly correlate with the future. This is in hopes of bringing awareness and change.