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Samuel E. Sisneros

University of New Mexico, ssisne01@unm.edu

Samuel Sisneros

University of New Mexico

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Student Activism and the *Three Peoples* Paintings

Challenging Settler Mythology at the University of New Mexico

Samuel Sisneros

ABSTRACT: *This essay chronicles five decades of periodic student activism against the controversial Three Peoples paintings on the walls of the University of New Mexico's Zimmerman Library. Painted in 1938–40 by Kenneth Adams, the paintings perpetuate the “tricultural myth”—a romantic, biased, stereotypical, and exclusive perspective of New Mexico. Student activists focused on what they saw as the racist and sexist imagery in the paintings’ portrayal of Chicano/Mexicano/Nuevomexicano/Hispanic and Native American peoples of New Mexico. Starting in 1970 with a Chicana student organization’s letter to the editor of the university newspaper, a twenty-five-year protest campaign against the Adams paintings was mobilized. It peaked during 1993–95 amid a university climate of racism and sexism, exemplified by UNM’s official destruction of a set of large murals depicting Chicano/Native American life. Although the organized activism has abated since 1995, objections to the Adams paintings continue, and the artworks remain on display in the library, sanctioned by the institution. Drawing on newspaper clippings, archival documents, activist propaganda, and photographs, the essay demonstrates how students raised their collective voices to establish a counternarrative to the artworks and demand redress.*

The controversial *Three Peoples* paintings by Kenneth Adams, consisting of four panels, have been exhibited on the walls of the University of New Mexico’s historic Zimmerman Library since 1940.¹ They have been viewed for close to eighty years by multitudes of students, staff, and faculty and by countless local and regional school groups and the touring public. What may not be known to many of these observers is the complex and fraught history surrounding these paintings, both before and years after they were installed. There is a long record of student activism against *Three Peoples*



Figure 1. The west wing (the old section) of the UNM Zimmerman Library as it appears currently. Photograph by Samuel Sisneros.

for their racist and sexist imagery. Periodically, students have led concerted campaigns to object to these paintings, arguing that they represent an Anglo American supremacist view of New Mexico, with Native American and native Chicano/Mexicano/Hispanic/Nuevomexicano people stereotypically represented as artisans or stoop laborers. In spite of this activism, the paintings remain on the walls of the library (fig. 1). After nearly eight decades, these paintings persist as a contentious issue within the university community, a debate sharpened by the current social-political climate. In particular, Donald Trump's campaign and election of 2015–16 and the first two years of his administration have resulted in heightened displays of nationalism, ethnocentrism, and sexism, which in turn have been met by nationwide activism—some centered on public art and memorials.

Since their conception, the Adams paintings have been officially touted as depicting New Mexico's three largest ethnic groups and their

SAMUEL SISNEROS, an Albuquerque native, is the manuscript archivist at the Center for Southwest Research and Special Collections, Zimmerman Library, University of New Mexico. He is currently working toward a post-degree certification in historic preservation and regionalism at the UNM School of Architecture and Planning. His primary areas of research include colonial and regional history, transborder/pan-Americanism, *mestizaje*, indigeneity, and identity. He recently published an article on the Genízaro legacy in New Mexico (*New Mexico Historical Review*, Fall 2017) and is contributing a chapter to a forthcoming anthology, *Genízaro Nation: Ethnogenesis, Place, and Identity in New Mexico*, from University of New Mexico Press.

contributions to the state. However, as we will see, many observers have regarded the paintings as a visual tool that supports stereotypes underlying the “tricultural myth.” This myth advances a false and romanticized vision of New Mexico as a harmonious land of only three cultures, excluding African Americans and other groups that have played a role in the state’s history. It perpetuates a historical and sociological perspective based on the subjugation of indigenous peoples, with fixed racial and social hierarchies that consciously and unconsciously maintain the notion that this perspective is normal. Expressing a distorted view of history, the Adams paintings have been viewed as simplistic and exploitative and as calling into question the character and mission of the University of New Mexico (UNM). Faced with the pernicious narrative of the paintings and the university’s insistence on upholding them, Chicana/o and Native American students at UNM have spearheaded an activist response. Focusing on the paintings as exemplifying notions of Anglo American and male supremacy, this essay will offer historical context for current discussions, protests, and potential policymaking regarding racial and gender equity at UNM and in the national public discourse.

To understand the arc of student activism that coalesced around these paintings, it is important to assess the changing demographics of the university. A few academic studies have addressed racial and cultural tensions at UNM’s Albuquerque campus, but it is not widely known that prior to the installation of the paintings, instances of discord on campus may have contributed to the decision of the university’s president at the time, James Zimmerman, to commission the paintings. They were seldom mentioned in campus or local newspapers for the first thirty years after their installation in 1940 in the library’s west wing, called the Great Hall. Thus it is not known how Hispanic and Native American students of that era viewed the artworks. Perhaps this was because there were so few of these students on campus, and as a small minority they may have been reluctant to speak out. Additionally, from the 1940s through the 1960s, social activism was not normally a part of the college experience at UNM. But in the early 1970s, increased enrollment of minority groups and the influence of nationwide civil rights and student movements led to the emergence of campus activism at UNM. UNM students directed their youthful energy toward various social issues, including the Adams paintings.

For over two decades, from 1970 to 1995, UNM students focused their anxieties first on what they deemed the racist, ethnocentric, and sexist imagery of the library paintings. Their campaign also pressed grievances

resulting from the 1993 destruction, ordered by UNM officials, of Chicano- and Native American-themed murals in the Student Union Building. In response to fervent student protest, the latter issue was addressed and the destroyed murals were repainted—albeit poorly curated and little celebrated. The controversy of the library paintings, on the other hand, was never resolved. After 1995, the movement dwindled, and during the first two decades of the 2000s there has been little mention of it in the public record. The following is a chronological narrative of these UNM public art controversies and related student activism. I draw on primary documents such as newspaper editorials and letters, archival documents, activist propaganda, and photographs to show how students raised their collective voice.

Historical Context: Conception and Installation of the Paintings

The Adams paintings were created in 1938–40, at the peak of the Great Depression, although they were not a Roosevelt WPA public works project but instead were funded privately. For New Mexico and the rest of the country, the 1930s and 1940s were decades of socioeconomic upheaval and distress, which heightened racial and ethnic antagonisms. In New Mexico, this had adverse impacts on “Spanish Americans” (that is, native Mexicans or Hispanics) and Native Americans, including those at UNM. As national unemployment skyrocketed, Mexican-descent people (including many who were US citizens) were held responsible for the country’s economic woes and were deported en masse to Mexico. Likewise, African Americans, Asian Americans, and indigenous peoples experienced injustices to their communities due to the overt racism and ethnocentrism that was condoned at the local, state, and federal levels (Acuña 2000; Cravens 2009). Segregation of these and other groups, to varying degrees, was customary in public educational institutions until civil rights actions and legislation began in the 1950s and 1960s.

Besides issues of segregation, UNM suffered from underrepresentation of Hispanics, Native Americans, and other minorities, and enrollment and graduation rates for these groups were low. Historical sociologist Phillip Gonzales found a steady increase in Hispanic students from the 1930s to 1940s, but they were still very much in the minority. According to Gonzales, in 1915 just one Hispanic student was enrolled; in 1922 the Hispanic student population was at 5 percent of the total, and by 1933 it had grown

to about 16 percent. By 1938 there were about three dozen students with Spanish surnames out of a total university enrollment of 1,405 (Gonzales 1986, 288; 2001, 71). Native American and African American enrollment was even smaller, as can be observed by looking through volumes of the *Mirage*, the UNM student yearbook.

The UNM catalog for 1916–17 also started to record the degrees conferred. The number of graduates with Spanish surnames was even more dismal than the number enrolled: just one of the fourteen graduates had a Spanish surname. (It should be noted that some Native Americans may have had Spanish surnames and some Hispanics may have had non-Spanish surnames.) It wasn't until 1922–23 that the catalog again listed graduates that may have been Hispanic: three out of thirty-four graduates (9 percent) had Spanish surnames. There are no enrollment or graduation data in the UNM catalog for 1923–24, but subsequent years show a slow, incremental increase. Between 1938, when the Adams paintings were conceived, painted, and installed, and 1945, a year after the end of Zimmerman's administration (1927–44), Spanish-surnamed graduates continued to increase, but their representation was still minimal: in 1938, they accounted for 5 percent; in 1939, 6 percent; in 1940, 8 percent; in 1941, 10 percent; in 1942, 6 percent; in 1943, 11 percent; in 1944, 8 percent; and in 1945, 12 percent.

The UNM catalog also listed advanced degrees. The first master's degree awarded to a Spanish-surnamed student at UNM was during Zimmerman's administration in 1930. From 1916 through 1945, Spanish-surnamed students earned thirty-nine of the 600 master's degrees conferred, or 6.5 percent. Also, during Zimmerman's tenure only six PhDs were conferred, all in the last four years of his tenure, from 1941 to 1944. Five of those PhDs were earned by Spanish-surnamed persons who appear to be from outside New Mexico or outside the United States (Spanish surnames are not regional).²

Despite the slight but steady increase in the Hispanic student body and the awarding of the first advanced degrees to Spanish-surnamed students during Zimmerman's administration, UNM's native Hispanic students did not enjoy wide acceptance in the larger university community. Indeed, tensions grew as Hispanic students on campus faced problems with sororities and fraternities systematically excluding or denying them membership. The Anti-Fraternity Bill of 1933 proposed to eliminate all Greek life from UNM in response to these discriminatory practices. Although it did not pass the legislature, the bill signaled to Nuevomexicano and Anglo legislators that

racism thrived on campus (Gonzales 1986; Welsh 1996; Zeleny 1944). Sociologist Carolyn Zeleny noted that her informants stated that “social separatism at the University of New Mexico was very marked,” as fraternities and sororities had “strict rules never to admit Spanish Americans” (1944, 306). In addition, her informants related that “Spanish Americans” were allowed to attend only one of the university dances per year and that Hispanics and Anglos rarely mixed, even in the common dining room. Zeleny concluded that because of the separatism on campus, many Spanish Americans opted not to attend UNM.

At the same time the Anti-Fraternity Bill was proposed, Professor Richard M. Page of the UNM Psychology Department composed a survey intended to explore Anglo attitudes toward the “natively Spanish-speaking people,” or Nuevomexicanos (Gonzales 2001). While the questionnaire would be considered insensitive by today’s standards, it is possible that Page posed leading questions to get at the root of local racial and ethnic tensions. The survey instructed respondents to put a check mark before each statement that “agreed perfectly” with their own attitudes. Although a few of the statements express indifference or relate positive interactions, most are insensitive or bigoted: “I certainly resent hearing the chatter of Spanish speaking people,” “It is glaringly obvious that the Spanish speaking people are inferior,” “No matter how much you educate Spanish speaking people, they are nothing but greasers,” “Every time you hire a Spanish speaking person you have to hire someone to watch him,” and lastly, “The Spanish speaking people are lower than animals.”³ The questionnaire caused considerable uproar and protest (and threats) in the local and statewide Nuevomexicano community. A meeting held in Spanish on May 5, 1933, in the Barelás neighborhood of Albuquerque was attended by 1,200 people who demanded the removal from UNM of both Professor Page, for his implementation of the survey, and President Zimmerman, for supporting the project (*Albuquerque Journal*, May 5, 9, 1933).

As demonstrated by the survey dispute and campus-wide separatism, President Zimmerman failed to reconcile ethnic tensions on campus. Whether or not he was genuinely trying to deal with the racial division and strife, it is possible that he chose the strategy of commissioning the Kenneth Adams paintings as a response to these problems. Coincidentally, Zimmerman was also deeply involved with promoting the New Mexico Coronado Cuarto Centennial celebrations, which began in 1940 as part of a large project to boost New Mexico’s image and economy through a glamorized version of the state’s history and celebration of its “three cultures.”⁴

Upon the opening of the new UNM library building in 1938, Zimmerman acquired funding from the Carnegie Foundation and hired his “friend and fishing companion,” Kenneth Adams, to paint the panels (Adams 1964). It is not known who developed the concept and imagery of the paintings, but they certainly fit into Zimmerman’s work in promoting New Mexico and the university. On October 22, 1938, the student newspaper, the *New Mexico Lobo*, featured an image of Adams with information that he would begin work on the paintings in the following weeks. Coincidentally, an article on the same page reported the appearance of Nazi swastikas on Student Union bulletin boards during campus elections, demonstrating continued racial tensions on campus (*New Mexico Lobo*, October 22, 1938). It was amid these tensions that the Adams paintings were created. The four panels were affixed onto the walls of the two-year-old library in March 1940, while the library was closed for Easter break (*New Mexico Lobo*, March 19, 1940, 1). The fact that the paintings were installed two years after the library’s opening (April 3, 1938) counters the perspective held by architectural preservationists that the Adams paintings were integral to the conception and original built environment of the library. In fact, this argument was used (and accepted) in the nomination of the Zimmerman Library to the National Register of Historic Places, with the set of paintings included as a feature contributing to the historic integrity of the library building.⁵

There was continued racial disharmony on campus during the year of the installation, as indicated in a write-up by the acting editor of the *Lobo*. He decried the increase in bullying on campus, relating it to what he called the “so-called social problem presented by the Spanish-American element.” (This “social problem” may be a reference to the separatism at the time, as discussed by Zeleny.) The *Lobo* editor warned those who “consider the native inferior” that they should treat their “Spanish-American brother” as they would like to be treated themselves. On behalf of the Hispanic students, the editor pleaded with the university community: “The land we now live on was explored and conquered by the ancestors of the group in the minority in the University. Those attending the University are here for one general purpose—to better the social conditions of their people” (*New Mexico Lobo*, April 23, 1940, 2).

Despite this attempt to protect the welfare and honor of Nuevo-mexicanos, there is no record of official measures to promote unity and inclusion of native Hispanic students, except insofar as the university used its (indirect and minimal) involvement in Pan Americanism projects to boost its own image. An example of the latter is *Union of the Americas*

Joined in Freedom, a true fresco mural painted on campus in 1942–43. Painted on an interior wall of UNM's Scholes Hall by artist-in-resident Jesús Guerrero Galván (1910–73), a Mexican national and member of the Mexican muralist movement of the early twentieth century, the mural represents the union of North and South America. An Anglo-looking woman with a child and Mexican or Indian-looking woman with a child greet each other at a river, all under the influence of Mother Liberty as a large, hovering, draped figure. Conceived in the spirit of Pan Americanism and the federal government's Good Neighbor policy, it was a nationalistic effort that had nothing to do with New Mexican indigeneity or with contemporaneous regional society and conflicts; nor does its imagery appear to simulate or critique the tricultural racial hierarchies depicted in the Adams paintings. Apparently, the only visual or contextual connection that the Guerrero Galván mural has to New Mexico, or to UNM and the Adams paintings, is that New Mexico is a border locality joining the United States with Latin America, and that both artworks use unity as an outward theme.

The Visual Model of the *Three Peoples* Paintings

The first three panels of the Adams paintings comment on the contributions made by New Mexico's "three cultures." The first panel depicts Native Americans making or displaying crafts or gazing into the horizon. The second panel shows Hispanic villagers laboring to apply mud plaster to an adobe wall and working in the fields, with no figures facing forward. All of the women in the first two panels are either sitting or kneeling on the ground or crouched over doing menial labor. Regardless of the oversimplification of the occupations of native women, the role of Hispanic women as *enjaradoras* (mud plasterers) was a respected tradition in New Mexico. The third panel shows Euro (Anglo) Americans sitting on chairs or standing facing forward in a sanitary indoor environment while engaged in professional science and medical occupations. A blond baby raised up by the central figure, a male Anglo doctor, is the only child in the paintings, perhaps implying that the future belongs to the Anglo. The final panel depicts the unification of the Native American, Nuevomexicano, and Anglo peoples by means of an Anglo man, who leads a Hispanic and a Native American man by the hand and links them to each other. The Anglo looks forward, to the future or to the viewer, while the other two men turn their eyeless faces toward him (fig. 2).

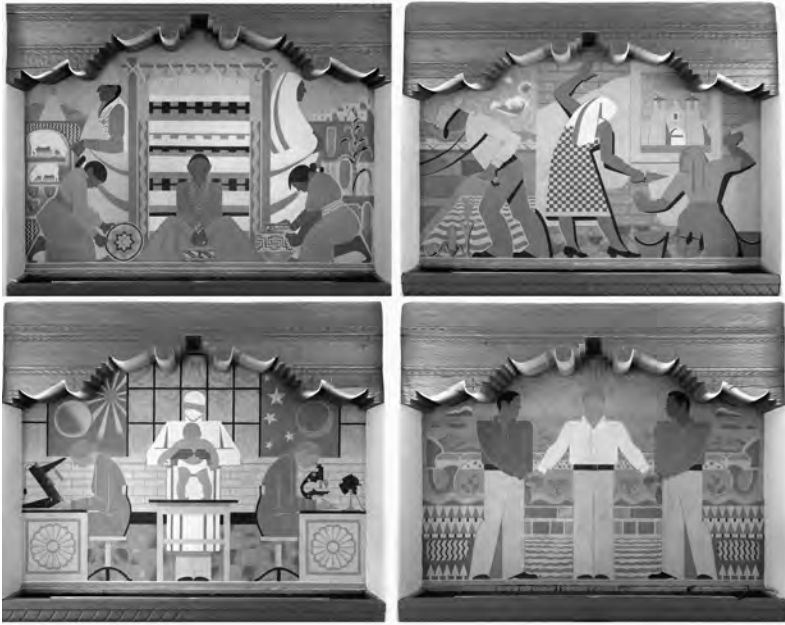


Figure 2. Kenneth Adams, *Three Peoples*, 1940. Oil on canvas, four panels. Color image (composite), taken after 1974. New Mexico Digital Collections, University Libraries, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.

The Adams paintings thus present exclusionary and hierarchical depictions of New Mexico's "three cultures." Ironically, this stratification was replicated in President Zimmerman's own household. In 1940, the household of the president's on-campus residence on Roma Avenue (where the president still lives today) included a thirty-two-year-old "Negro" housemaid named Addie May Alexander. Previously, President Zimmerman had another private family maid, Corina Esquibel, a native Nuevomexicana.⁶ Zimmerman's household makeup provides additional evidence of the racial and social hierarchy existing at the time, not only nationally and statewide but also on the UNM campus. With the omission of African Americans from the paintings, Zimmerman and Adams failed to be inclusive of African American existence. The paintings could have also been an opportunity to incorporate the viable female occupation of housemaid and other work situations engaged by women that were not just agricultural, craft making, or stoop labor. In addition, in searching the archives, there seems to be no indication that Addie May or Corina benefited educationally at UNM from their close relationship with James Zimmerman.

The scenes in the panels can be viewed as products of their time. At that moment in world history, eugenics, a celebrated pseudo-science, was taking hold in Germany and in the United States and was contemporaneously expressed through social Darwinism theories. The panels, while arguably intended to depict unity, could also be interpreted as the (then) culmination of modernity in the scientifically sponsored notion of white supremacy. This visual model also exemplifies the strategies or rhetoric of the seemingly benevolent imposed script of vertical mobility for all, through what Mary Louise Pratt calls the European male's "imperial eyes" that "passively look out and possess." Pratt calls the practitioner of this dual strategy (or syndrome) of both innocence and possessiveness the "seeing-man" (1992, 7). Using this theoretical framework would suggest that the Adams paintings, while supposedly intended to recognize the contributions of Hispanics and Native Americans, in fact advance an underlining trope of racialized and ethnocentric hegemonic power and dominance. Furthermore, the paintings effectively sweep aside all evidence of ethnic and racial antagonism, separatism, and underrepresentation in New Mexico and on the UNM campus. More important, the murals basically present "a people without history," to use Eric R. Wolf's (2010) memorable phrase, in order to isolate, constrain, and bind colonized populations together with the colonizer in an embrace of normalcy.

One can best see this normalcy in New Mexico within the concepts of the tricultural state or "three peoples," as the library paintings are titled. The tricultural concept posits a New Mexico with only three cultures, thus excluding African Americans and other ethnic groups that have contributed to New Mexico history. Such an incomplete depiction offers simplified cultural tropes for the purpose of commercial exploitation through tourism. Sylvia Rodriguez has discussed how tourism has structured race and class relations in modern New Mexico and how "tricultural harmony" is the "enduring and endearing cliché of New Mexico as a tourist mecca" (2001, 197). Chris Wilson states that the Adams paintings "constitute the foremost distillation of the visual iconography of triculturalism." He further recognizes how the paintings convey racial and gender hierarchies that, he notes, "became painfully transparent following the civil rights movement" (Wilson 2003, 27, 29).

The tricultural myth specific to New Mexico is not to be confused with the Mexican nationalistic and Chicano movement ideology, identity, and imagery of *las tres culturas* (three cultures) or *las tres caras* (three faces), also associated with *la raza cósmica* (the cosmic—mixed—race). The three



Figure 3. Carlos Cervantes, Carlos Leyba, and Samuel Leyba, detail of *Las Tres Culturas del Mestizo*, 1986. Mural in Santa Fe. From *Only in Santa Fe*, by Susan Hazen-Hammond and Eduardo Fuss (Stillwater, MN: Voyageur, 1992), 48. Pictorial Collections, PICT 2011-001, slide #2011-b3-fo4-0003, Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.

cultures or three faces ideology affirms the creation of the nation of Mexico and its mestizo people, who have both Spanish and Native American roots (fig. 3). This concept celebrates the history of Mexico and the Southwestern United States—be it tragic at times—and centers on cultural and racial hybridization and plurality as an emergence narrative rather than on the cultural or racial purity and social positionalities that the Adams paintings express. The *tres culturas*, or *tres caras*, symbol includes a Spanish profile on one side and Native American profile on the other, while the center figure represents the face of the “third culture,” or *La Raza* (Anaya, Lomeli, and Lamadrid 2017). The symbol appears in murals, tattoos, and barrio art. While it is also problematic and needs further deconstruction within gender and identity studies, it provides, for the purpose of this analysis, a counternarrative to the tricultural myth.

Initial Student Activism, 1970–74

As discussed in the introduction to this essay, there was no written mention of the Adams paintings or any recorded opposition to them from the 1950s to 1960s. In the 1960s, Hispanic enrollment was only 10 percent

of the UNM student body, even though Hispanics were 40 percent of the state's total population. Native American enrollment was even lower, proportionate to their state population. It wasn't until the 1970s that institutional participation by Hispanic and Native American students began to increase, although they were still in the minority (Gonzales-Berry and Maciel 2000, 287). At the start of that decade, the growing UNM Native American and Chicana/o student population joined antiwar and countercultural student protests on campus, and due to a sense of cultural isolation and underrepresentation, they began to focus on what they saw as a culturally debilitating message contained in the Adams paintings. The first recorded activism against the paintings was started by a group of young female Chicana students at UNM, who used the campus newspaper, the *New Mexico Lobo*, to voice their protest. This became the established and favored practice in student activism against the paintings.

On October 22, 1970, the *Lobo* published a letter to the editor from Joann Santiago on behalf of a newly formed organization called "Las Chicanas" (fig. 4). Titled "Racism in Zimmerman," the letter stated that the paintings were degrading and offensive to "Mexican and native American"

Figure 4. Letter to the editor, *New Mexico Lobo*, October 22, 1970, 8. Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque. Also in UNM Digital Repository.



peoples. Las Chicanas declared that the paintings depicted “the Mexican and native American as the weak and unknowing, being helped by the superior ‘White Father.’” They confidently asserted that, unlike the eyes of the native people in the Adams paintings, “our eyes are open,” and they “strongly urge[d]” that the paintings be removed or replaced. They even threw in a “Basta!” (Enough!), one of the Chicano movement’s mantras.

In rebuttal to the Las Chicanas letter, an art student of Adams’s named Jon VerPloegh wrote what would become a standard defense of the paintings. This included honoring the artist’s life, prestige, and intentions, expressing devotion to the tricultural myth and the state’s “traditional” cultural roles, and paying homage to indigenous cultural artifacts and the geographic scenery of New Mexico. The art student’s letter stated that “the mural depicts a white man as a newcomer, bewildered, looking very conspicuous, arriving in an impressive scene symbolized in the background of the mural by artifacts of the Mexican and Indian cultures. The native Americans and Mexican Americans join hands in welcome” (*New Mexico Lobo*, November 4, 1970).

Just a few weeks after the *Lobo* published the Las Chicanas letter and subsequent letters of both support and disapproval, on November 25, 1970, black paint was thrown at the center figure of the fourth panel of the Adams paintings (*New Mexico Lobo*, November 30, 1970). The evening of the incident, a representative of an anonymous “revolutionary” or “radical” women’s group called into KUNM, the campus radio station, and claimed responsibility for the defacement. The woman stated that the group had defaced the artwork because it was “degrading to the New Mexican community” and that the members of the group would “no longer sit silently by and allow our oppressed sisters and brothers to be insulted by the institutions which are supposed to serve us” (*New Mexico Lobo*, December 1, 1970). This women’s group was in fact a student cohort of young Anglo women known at the time for that kind of activism. They are also credited with starting the women’s studies core at UNM.⁷

Even though this group had admitted to the vandalism, many still blamed Las Chicanas. One writer to the *Lobo*, while claiming not to imply that Las Chicanas did the damage, nonetheless evoked that group only, stating that the perpetrators sought adverse publicity and calling them the “Naughties at the University.” Las Chicanas (Kathy Gallegos, Nancy Montaña, Beverly Padilla, Joann Santiago, and Pauline Vigil) denied any responsibility for the vandalism, but said the university should have taken their advice to remove the wall paintings. They also reaffirmed statements

made in their original letter and criticized the response letter by Adams's student. They said it was absurd to suggest that the Mexican and Native American welcomed the Anglo, since Mexicans and Native Americans had joined arms in bloody resistance "against representatives of Manifest Destiny before during and after the Mexican-American War" (*New Mexico Lobo*, December 1, 1970). They were referring to the 1846–48 occupation of New Mexico by US forces that resulted in a unified armed confrontation by Pueblo Indians and Hispanics (commonly known as the Taos Revolt of 1847), who murdered several Anglo invaders, including Charles Bent, the first New Mexico governor under the US administration.

Las Chicanas' bold statements came at a time when Chicana/o studies and Chicana/o awareness was just starting to take hold on the periphery of the mainstream university. The UNM Chicana and Chicano Studies Program started in 1970, although it was only loosely and minimally supported by the university administration. In the mid-1970s, Beverly Padilla Sanchez, one of Las Chicanas and a graduate student at the time, taught the first class at UNM on the "Mujer Chicana," first through women's studies and then through the Chicana/o studies program. Padilla Sanchez co-taught this class with another pioneer of Chicana studies, Erlinda Gonzales-Berry (Gonzales-Berry and Maciel 2000).

The newspapers continued to publicize letters and articles related to the defacement of the fourth panel. The *Albuquerque Tribune* reported on November 28, 1970, that many faculty were shocked by the act, although UNM President Ferrel Heady was quoted as saying that he was not surprised and in fact had anticipated that the mural would be defaced by a "terrorist group." Subsequent letters and articles about the mural immediately began flowing into the university newspaper, sometimes under the heading "another Zimmerman letter." Letter writers were largely divided along racial lines in defending or opposing the paintings. Some (mostly Hispanic) demanded removal of the artworks, while others (mostly Anglo) levied accusations of art censorship or complained about the costs of repairing the fourth panel (around \$3,000).

On December 10, 1970, the *New Mexico Lobo* published a letter from Emiliano Aranda, who remarked, "Regardless of the artist's cultural and racial attitudes or his interpretation of the three cultures in New Mexico, the Chicano and native American at this time—now—today—find this painting very derogatory." Aranda also pointed out that "when government policy (University administrative policy included) and connoisseurs of art think more of money spent on repairs for this painting rather than of

human feelings and the psychological damage inflicted upon these ethnic groups, society is in a bad situation.” Aranda also signed his letter with a “Ya Basta!” which was perhaps meant to complement or one-up Las Chicanas’ “Basta!” sign-off.

The defaced panel was restored, and the Adams paintings controversy appeared to subside for a couple of years. Meanwhile, Chicana/o and Native American students involved in activism on campus began to use the university newspaper extensively to express their overall political opinions and precepts. From 1971 to 1972 the newspaper included three short-lived feature pages: the “Chicano News Page,” “La Plebe,” and “Red Dawn,” the latter expressing a Native American perspective. Native American students’ activism increased during this time, driven by off-campus community issues and by the tragic shooting death of Larry Casuse, a UNM student, activist, and Kiva Club member (Correia 2013). The early 1970s also saw the formation of a UNM chapter of the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA). The October 10, 1973, *New Mexico Daily Lobo* posted an announcement of the first organizational meeting of MEChA, to take place that evening in the Chicano studies program space on campus.⁸ In addition, the front page of that very issue reported on a meeting of the Legislative University Study Committee a few days prior. This state government committee, which looked into student issues, reported that students had requested the removal of the Zimmerman Library paintings. Even though it did not say who the students were, it was most likely the early group of Chicano studies and MEChA students. Senator Ernesto Gómez of the legislative committee had strong objections to the paintings, and after complaining of the cost to restore the panel following the 1970 defacement, he said, “It was restored in its original profane version. It shows a blue-eyed Anglo leading his blind little brothers. There have been many attempts at its removal but no results.”

Just a few months after the Legislative University Study Committee meeting, the fourth panel was defaced for a second time, on January 26, 1974 (fig. 5). Green enamel paint was hurled at the exact place that had been splashed with black paint in 1970 (*New Mexico Daily Lobo*, January 28, 1974). It is not known who was responsible for this second defacing, but this action spurred a deluge of letters to the newspapers. The second defacing was easily repaired because of a protective clear varnish that had been applied during the first restoration. In order to further protect the mural, self-designated “art lovers” and J. F. Harvey, dean of the library, considered the option of erecting a “second wall in front of the wall containing the



Figure 5. Fourth panel of the Adams paintings splattered with paint, 1974. University of New Mexico, Department of Facility Planning Records, UNMA 028, box 69, folder: Library—Zimmerman Interior #53, Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.

controversial mural.” A university representative said the second wall would be left up to “hide” the mural for a few years until the “the climate around here has changed” (*Albuquerque Tribune*, January 31, 1974). There is no record, however, that the panels were temporarily covered.

Although there were no further defacements after 1974, a climate of racial tension and student activism continued on campus in the 1980s, though most of the activism related to other issues. In 1984 a person named Carl Valdez wrote to the campus newspaper, questioning the preservation of the paintings at New Mexico’s largest public university. He said the paintings perpetuated myths of Chicanos and Native Americans as stoop laborers even though UNM had many native students graduating in science, medicine, and technology fields. He posed the question to the university: “Is it better to admit racism, or to tacitly accept racist views?” He continued, “These choices [UNM preserving the paintings] set the dilemma of fairness toward minorities vis-à-vis freedom of expression” (*New Mexico Daily Lobo*, October 24, 1984). Valdez’s letter appears to be the lone documented opposition to the Adams paintings during the 1980s.

Perhaps influenced by the larger social and political tensions in the 1980s (around Reaganomics, Iran-Contra, the Berlin Wall, AIDS, etc.), at the start of the 1990s then University Archives curator Terry Gugliotta, along with Professor Phillip Gonzales of the Department of Sociology, prepared a short booklet on the history and controversy around the paintings. They discussed Adams's and Zimmerman's original intentions, which they saw as attempting to remedy claims of "ethnic inequalities." The report also highlighted the "ethnic tensions" and defacements of the 1970s. It concluded by stating that even though the original intention was purportedly to depict cultural pluralism, the artwork "inadvertently triggers ethnic sensitivities" and that "Adams may have incorporated an ethnocentric bias despite his egalitarian avowal."⁹ The UNM university archivist and the professor perhaps saw the writing on the wall, and with their booklet they were gearing up for a new surge of opposition to the controversial library art.

Second Wave of Student Activism and Negotiations, 1993–95

The 1990s saw an intensified climate of ethnocentrism, racism, sexism, and prejudice, with many incidents of hate crimes on the UNM campus. In 1995 the Anti-Defamation League and the Department of Campus Affairs/Higher Education delivered a report to the vice president of Student Affairs, compiling over twenty racist or hate crimes at UNM from 1992 to 1995. Most of the crimes involved white nationalist propaganda, graffiti, and swastikas targeting black, Jewish, gay and lesbian, feminist, and Hispanic students and campus organizations.¹⁰ One example of these hate crimes occurred in November 1995, when a group calling themselves "Students Against the Brown Peril" inserted racist propaganda flyers into delivered bundles of school newspapers. The inserts contained violent verbiage such as "send the greasy no-brainers back to Mexico in body bags." A subsequent issue of the *Daily Lobo* contained an official editorial informing readers of the paper's disapproval of the flyer. Unrelated but on the same page was a cartoon commentary illustrating a woman being physically attacked and desperately trying to use a campus emergency phone that was inoperable because it was being remodeled to make it more aesthetic (*New Mexico Daily Lobo*, November 10, 1995). Another hate crime, which coincidentally took place in the Zimmerman Library in November 1994, involved the removal and disappearance of five shelves of periodicals related to feminism, homosexuality, and Jewish studies, and their replacement with books on

Nazism. Missing journals were later found hidden in the basement of the library, some of the feminist journals having been defaced with swastikas and offensive phrases (*New Mexico Daily Lobo*, November 21, 1994). These hate crimes and the campus environment exemplify how racism, sexism, and homophobia go hand in hand.

This overall UNM climate in the 1990s is perhaps what mobilized the second wave of student activism focused on the Adams paintings. On March 3, 1993, student groups presented a resolution to the UNM Steering Committee that demanded the replacement of the Zimmerman paintings by “murals which do not promote stereotypes of people of color and Anglos, but [artwork] that portrays all New Mexicans as equals” (*New Mexico Daily Lobo*, March 9, 1993). The next day, under the umbrella of the Associated Students of the University of New Mexico (ASUNM), student organizations such as MEChA, Kiva Club, Hispanic Honor Society, Southwest Indian Student Coalition, and other groups held a rally on the UNM campus in opposition to the Adams paintings. The mostly Chicano and Native American students voiced concerns that the imagery in the Adams paintings expressed ideas of white supremacy and sexism and reduced native peoples to stereotypical racial and social roles (*New Mexico Daily Lobo*, March 10, 1993).

The co-organizers of the rally, Rodney (Moises) Gonzales, MEChA vice president, and Chris Sánchez, a student senator, introduced many speakers, with local Chicano muralist Francisco LeFebvre as the featured speaker.¹¹ The main demand coming from the podium and echoed by those interviewed was to remove the paintings or, alternatively, to install a plaque describing the panels as racist. The March 1993 rally was followed by a scheduled meeting with the ASUNM, where the group presented a resolution that was amended and passed by the faculty senate.¹² The senate apparently did not take any action, immediate or otherwise.

As in the 1970s, these 1993 undertakings also spurred letters to the *Daily Lobo* both in support of and in opposition to the Adams paintings. Responding to an earlier letter from UNM Professor Philip Bock, in which he argued that the mural should be valued because it is historic, UNM Spanish Department instructor Elisa Martínez rejected his logic in a letter published March 12, 1993, claiming that Bock’s argument was “as foolish as saying South Africa should retain its segregated, white-supremacist society because of its historical tenure.” She further wrote, “Who cares that the Carnegie Foundation funded this mural more than 50 years ago? Haven’t we spent money on things in the past that turn out to be wrong

and politically unenlightened? It is possible to alter a mural or even get rid of it in order to correct our mistakes in the past, and to be aware of all races in our society” (*New Mexico Daily Lobo*, March 12, 1993). Just a week later another letter appeared in the *Daily Lobo*, this one opposed to “blotting out” or “changing” the Zimmerman paintings, calling it censorship. This *Daily Lobo* reader added that there was a risk this could also happen to other art on campus, only mentioning the Aztec calendar mural in the Student Union Building as an example (*New Mexico Daily Lobo*, March 22, 1993).

Destruction of the Student Union Murals and Formation of the Mural Coalition

A few months after the 1993 MEChA-sponsored rally and the subsequent *New Mexico Daily Lobo* letters, an incident took place that amplified the already heightened tensions on campus and fulfilled the “blotting out” prediction (or suggestion) made by the student who opposed censorship. Although this incident can be considered censorship, it was not perpetrated by students. In August 1993, the interim director of the Student Union, Robert Schulte, gave the order to paint over a series of murals located on the inside walls of the Casa del Sol restaurant in the basement of the UNM Student Union Building (SUB). These murals had been painted in 1981 by a multicultural consortium of students led by local artists Jerry Rael (Chicano) and Ike Davis (African American). The main mural featured a utopian Hispanic and Pueblo landscape, while other murals depicted a large Aztec calendar and Native American dances. On Schulte’s direction, they were covered with two coats of primer and three coats of latex enamel wall paint.¹³

UNM student Laura Montoya (now a UNM staff member) was one of the first to notice the paint-over done during the weekend. When she complained to Schulte, he immediately responded that it was “just decoration for a Mexican restaurant” and that “they would get over it.”¹⁴ After immediate protest by student groups, however, UNM officials recognized their mistake and apologized for having been insensitive in making the decision to paint over the murals. Individuals—students and some faculty, along with MEChA—set out to rectify this and looked into removing the overcoating. By September it was still uncertain whether the murals could be restored. After consultation with MEChA, minority recruitment and retention representatives, and a loose coalition of concerned students, Orcilia Zúñiga Forbes, the vice president of Student Affairs, proposed commissioning the same artists to re-create the murals on canvas.¹⁵

In September 1993, a demonstration that started out as a Mexican independence celebration on campus led to a walk-in vigil culminating in the Zimmerman Library. Participating were some forty students from MEChA and La Raza Estudiantil, along with representatives of groups calling themselves the Chicano Liberation Movement and the Chicano Underground. They assembled in front of Scholes Hall, raised a Mexican flag, and sang the Mexican national anthem. The group then marched into the Zimmerman Library, where they proceeded to protest the Adams paintings as symbols of oppression. They also protested the destruction of the SUB paintings and the vandalization of another mural, painted by renowned local muralist Francisco LeFebre, in a building that previously housed Chicano Student Services. The protesters lit candles in front of the Adams paintings and placed them around a spontaneous installation of a scorched American flag. ASUNM Senator Chris Sánchez attended the protest in the library and said that the Adams artwork “goes against what the University is trying to do in the first place.” He further exclaimed, “You can’t promote diversity with this kind of art.” On a lighter, humorous note, one of the protesters, apparently from the Chicano Underground faction, pranked the newspaper reporter by giving her name as “Cuca Racha” (*New Mexico Daily Lobo*, September 17, 1993).

These 1993 events led to the formation of the UNM Mural Coalition. Several UNM organizations were part of the coalition, such as MEChA, Kiva Club, La Raza Estudiantil, ASUNM, Black Student Union, Graduate Student Association, Hispanic Honor Society, Hispanic Student Services, National Organization of Women, Lesbian Bisexual Gay Alliance, NAACP, and others. The initial contentious issue, as expressed in coalition minutes, was the fact that the Casa del Sol murals had been painted over without seeking feedback from students or other persons with “legitimate input,” while at the same time the “racist murals in Zimmerman are still standing without explanation.”¹⁶ Coalition members Neri Holguin (Chicana Mechista) and Anders Nelson, in an articulate opinion piece in the *Daily Lobo* titled “Administration talks, doesn’t walk,” criticized the university’s “big boo-boo” in painting over the SUB murals:

Apparently the campus authorities have a twisted idea of the importance of mural art. Preserved at all cost is the out-of-date, racist slander on the walls of Zimmerman Library. Meanwhile, valuable multi-cultural works of art in Casa del Sol are destroyed without a thought. More combative souls than ourselves might easily read an overtly racist gesture into the pair of actions. (*New Mexico Daily Lobo*, June 22–29, 1994)

Seeing the impossibility of restoring the Casa del Sol murals, by the end of June the coalition had shifted its efforts toward getting funds to re-create them. They proposed a sum of \$42,599 for this purpose. Eventually, the university provided funding and the destroyed murals were re-created on canvas at the same scale and by the same lead artists. Two paintings—*Aztec Calendar* and the large two-canvas painting of the Hispanic and Pueblo landscape, titled *Indigenous Pueblo*—hang on the walls on the third floor of the SUB (figs. 6, 7).¹⁷ Another SUB painting, *Aztec Snake Dance*, was about



Figure 6. Jerry Rael and Ike Davis, *Aztec Calendar*, re-created in 1994. Acrylic on canvas, 12 × 6 feet. Student Union Building, third floor, lobby. Photograph by Samuel Sisneros.

Figure 7. Jerry Rael and Ike Davis, *Indigenous Pueblo*, re-created in 1994. Acrylic on canvas, 12 × 30 feet. Student Union Building, third floor, south hall. Photograph by Samuel Sisneros.





Figure 8. Samuel Sisneros standing in front of Jerry Rael and Ike Davis's *Aztec Snake Dance* in 2018. Re-created in 1994. Acrylic on canvas, 140 × 12 feet. Student Union Building, basement office hallway. Photograph by Samuel Sisneros.

75 percent repainted when it was vandalized with a swastika, which was also reportedly done to *Indigenous Pueblo*. This did not deter the completion of *Aztec Snake Dance*, the largest of the reconstructed murals, which today is hidden away in a narrow, long hallway leading to a student government office area in the Student Union Building, with no signage describing how these paintings came to be (fig. 8).¹⁸

Mural Coalition Activism and the UNM Administration

The Mural Coalition was now deeply involved in two public art and restorative justice causes at UNM. While they made strides toward reconciling the SUB mural injustices, members began to focus their activism on the Adams paintings. In July 1994, the Mural Coalition developed a strategy to counter the objectionable content of the paintings. The coalition would first call for their removal. If this failed, the coalition would demand the commission of a new multicultural mural, then the installation of a “qualifier plaque,” and then, if none of these demands was met, they would stage campus protests. At a meeting on September 12, 1994, the coalition discussed a plan for a

meeting of the UNM Board of Regents that was to take place the following day in Scholes Hall. According to the coalition's minutes, the agenda designated who was going to talk about the "racist content" and "sexist and classist nature" of the Adams paintings, but the minutes of the regents' meeting do not mention that the coalition was present. On October 6 and again on October 7, demonstrations took place at Zimmerman Library plaza that included the distribution of chant sheets and flyers that expressed the intentions, ambitions, and sentiments of the activists (figs. 9, 10).

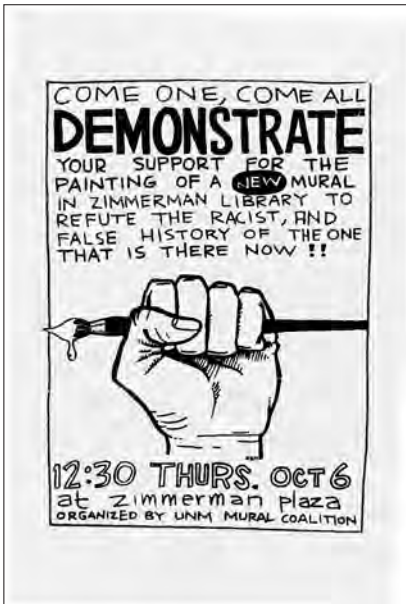


Figure 9. Student protest flyer, undated. UNM Mural Coalition Records, UNMA 021, Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.

Figure 10. Student protest chant sheet, undated. UNM Mural Coalition Records, UNMA 021, Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.

CHANT SHEET

- 1.) IGNORING THE PROBLEM WON'T MAKE IT GO AWAY!
 - 2.) WE'RE HERE TO STAY, THE TRUTH MUST BE PORTRAYED!
 - 3.) WITH RACIST ART, WE MUST PART!
 - 4.) HEY HEY HO HO RACIST ART HAS GOT TO GO!
 - 5.) WHAT DO WE WANT? JUSTICE/ NEW MURALS
WHEN DO WE WANT IT? NOW!
 - 6.) WE DON'T KNOW WHAT WE'VE BEEN TOLD,
THE REGENTS LIE, THEY ACT SO BOLD
OUR HISTORY HAS NOT BEEN TOLD
THIS SHIT IS GETTING MIGHTY OLD
- ARE WE RIGHT OR WRONG? WE'RE RIGHT!
ARE WE WEAK OR STRONG? WE'RE STRONG!

The student rallies brought the desired attention to the cause. On October 11, 1994, the student senate discussed the students' concerns and their demands that the following actions be proposed to the regents:

1. A "deconstructionist" plaque in front of the current murals.
2. A book there for viewers' comments.
3. A new mural adjacent to the older ones that would address the historical inaccuracies and other concerns raised by the paintings.¹⁹

The following day, October 12, Mural Coalition members staged another demonstration, carrying signs and calling for the regents to take action. The university newspaper covered the protest of the "long-standing controversy" in an article that highlighted one of the demands voiced by coalition member Neri Holguin: "We want an obtrusive qualifier to reconstruct the racist and sexist meanings in the murals" (*New Mexico Daily Lobo*, October 12, 1994). The day after the student demonstration, the regents looked into the measures proposed by the Mural Coalition (fig. 11). The coalition requested that the board act on the statement, which suggested wording for a plaque they wanted installed near the mural. This was discussed during a series of board meetings (December 9, 12, 13, 14).²⁰ Vice President Zúñiga Forbes worked with legal counsel and with the director of the UNM Art Museum to come up with a revised version of the wording, which was recommended and approved by both the UNM Board of Regents Student Affairs Committee and the Mural Coalition on December 9. Regent Barbara Brazil further moved that the language be adopted and a plaque be placed next to the murals.

One regent voiced an objection to the proposal as moved, stating that the murals reflected "the context of the time." Another regent did not favor the proposal, believing that it could set a precedent for future boards to change the wording to reflect future changing attitudes. The conversation then moved toward painting another mural instead of installing a plaque. Even though Vice President Zúñiga Forbes argued that "this issue has been around for some time and keeps surfacing because various groups have wanted something done to recognize that this [artwork] is not appropriate in today's time," a motion was made to further research the issue, and was unanimously approved.²¹

A few months later, on February 14, 1995, the regents met with the Mural Coalition, whose members expressed their frustration that the full board had not acted on the "possible solutions" to the issue. Acting as an adviser to the regents, Alberto Solís, president of ASUNM, "strongly requested" that a decision be reached soon on the library paintings. The

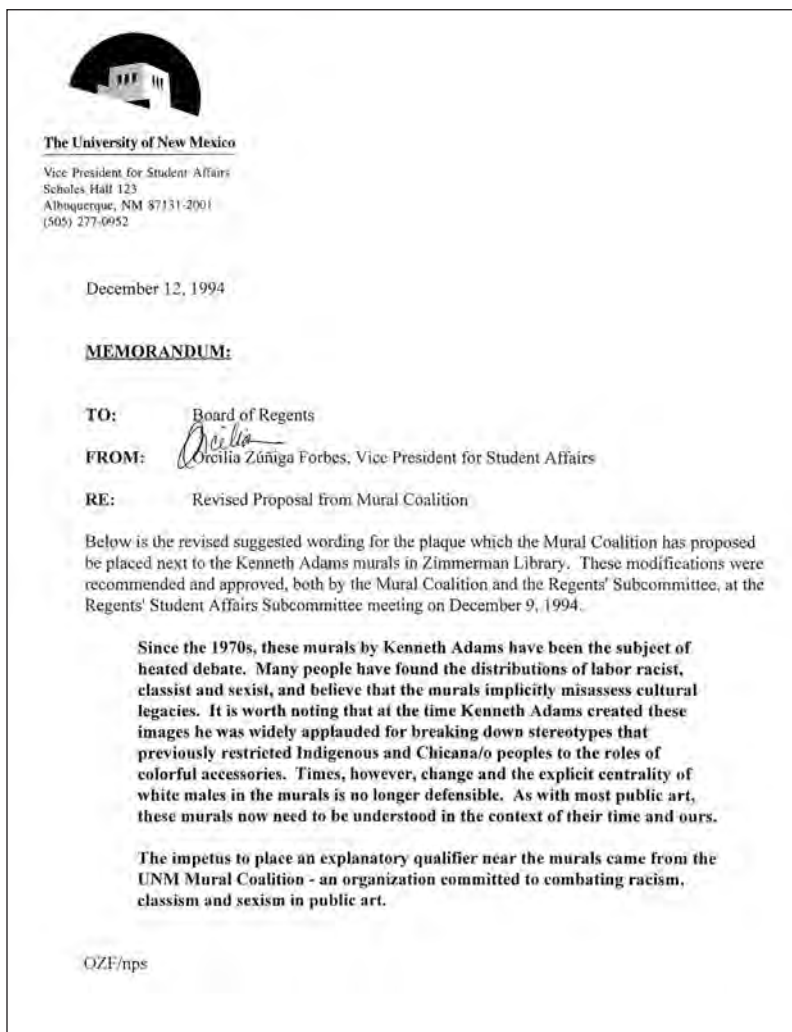


Figure 11. Proposed wording from the Mural Coalition for an explanatory plaque to accompany the Adams murals, December 12, 1994. University of New Mexico Board of Regents Records, UNMA 011, box 19, folder: Regent's Agenda—University Secretary, December 13, 1994, Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.

president of the board assured the group that the regents' Student Affairs Committee would meet soon on this. By February 23, 1995, Mural Coalition leaders reported they were growing tired of the "runaround" and delays by the regents. On February 27, 1995, another meeting took place, in which

it was agreed to continue to look at the wording of the plaque that was to be installed adjacent to the paintings, but the proposed text was rejected mainly because the “artist’s family could possibly claim the statement is defamatory.” Head coalition members Neri Holguin and Lilly Irvin said that they believed the administration was using delaying tactics and trying to string them along since they were set to graduate the following semester. They stated that they had been trying to follow the correct administrative procedures for too long and “may be forced to take more strident measures” (*New Mexico Daily Lobo*, February 23 and February 28, 1995). At the March 23, 1995, board meeting, Brazil said that the Students Affairs Committee discussed approaches to the requests by the Mural Coalition and recommended the following:

1. That a contextual plaque with historical reference be developed by a special Task Force, which will determine the language to be used in the plaque. The Board of Regents will not be asked to approve the specific language. The board is asked to approve the concept of the contextual plaque being placed close to the existing library murals. (No mention of Zúñiga Forbes’s December 12, 1994, memo.)
2. That, as part of the designation of a contextual plaque, the Task Force develop the following items to promote a broad educational effort regarding the library murals and the murals of the 1930s in general: (a) an exhibition in the library that will explain the library murals and related materials; (b) a symposium to focus on the murals of the 1930s and related issues; (c) a brochure explaining the library murals and other programs; and (d) other educational programs in the future on these topics.
3. That the request for an additional mural in the library be referred to the Art in Public Places Committee to make the decisions on the mural as per their charge. Funding for the mural will be identified by the Task Force, Mural Coalition, and Art in Public Places Committee.
4. That a Task Force composed of a representative of the library, a representative of the Art and Art History Department, the director of the Art Museum, and three representatives of the Mural Coalition will be formed. The Mural Coalition will coordinate the work of the Task Force. Vice President Orcilia Zúñiga Forbes will assist the Task Force. A timeline for completion of the projects will be developed by the Task Force.

Brazil moved for approval of the four proposals and Regent Gene Gallegos seconded the motion.²² A vote was taken and board members unanimously approved. Although the motion was carried, it is obvious that no further action took place at that time—or at any time since then.

The last mention of the Mural Coalition was in a 1995 April Fool's Day parody edition of the *New Mexico Daily Lobo*, called the *Daily Leftist*. The front page of the newspaper featured a mock article titled "Mural Coalition Activists Join Frat." It named Neri Holguin and Lilly Irvin and fictitiously and satirically reported that they had renounced their activist causes, joined a fraternity, and taken on conservative causes instead. One student voiced a response to this parody by claiming that even though it was supposedly a spoof, it was sexist, and because it named names, it was outright slander and libel, defaming the character of the coalition members. Apparently, Holguin and Irvin indeed grew tired of the mural issue after this last unfavorable mention of them and the coalition, since by late 1995 and into 1996 they began to refocus their activism on tuition increases and on minority recruitment and retention issues. Holguin and thirteen other students were arrested on campus for these causes (*New Mexico Daily Lobo*, March 22, 1996). Neri Holguin, an articulate and vital leader in the mural counter campaigns, graduated from UNM in 1996 with a BA in sociology and political science and has had a successful career as a political consultant.

Student Activism since 2000

After the 1995 activism and into the first decade of 2000, there appear to have been no further student-organized activities on this issue, or at least none known and accessible for this study, except for the lone 2010 writings of then graduate student Steve Stockdale, an Anglo-American. In Stockdale's first writing for a class reflection project, he drafted an articulate analysis and critique of the paintings' imagery and the administration's protection of the paintings and outlined a well-planned proposal to conduct a university-wide survey on attitudes toward the Adams paintings. After his initial viewing of the panels, he noted a number of objections:

Each different "race" is represented by stark color differences; the Indians and Spanish are depicted in subservient poses with heads bowed, with women kneeling, men engaged in menial labor wearing "native" work clothes; the fair-haired, blue-eyed Anglo doctor is responsible for delivering life as his identically-fair assistants are seated doing "scientific"

work; and then the “union” of the three (male) races made possible by the Anglo in the middle facing outward with full facial features, with the Indian and Spanish now adopting the Anglo’s clothes, joined only through the patriarchal Anglo, both faces in profile without discernible features.

In the same paper, Stockdale stated, “Both in terms of the presumptions that created the vision, and the artistic expression of that vision onto the panels, I find the mural worthy of offended judgments, sincere objections and harsh criticism, irrespective of its otherwise ‘artistic’ contribution to its historic home.”²³ He then contacted the UNM dean of libraries to voice his objections and offer recommendations for actions to deal with the offensive paintings. The dean responded that his criticisms were appropriate, but after consulting with library staff, the dean reported back to Stockdale that “the murals were fine as is and warranted no ‘extra effort or attempt to define a stand or create additional context.’”²⁴

Stockdale contributed to the many years of concerted work by young activist students by adding to their collective effort to contextualize the paintings with cultural and historical meaning. But the Adams paintings and the reconstructed Chicano/Native American paintings in the Student Union Building all remain exhibited at UNM to this day, even though their different public treatment and curation attest to continued biases. The Adams paintings, on one hand, are well described in university and library publications and printed material, and text adjacent to the paintings celebrating the artist, the Taos Art Society, the New Deal era, and UNM’s “Pueblo Style” architecture, designed by renowned architect John G. Meem. On the other hand, the Aztec calendar, the Pueblo or village cultural landscape, and the enormous Aztec dance paintings in the SUB are uncelebrated, neglected, hidden, and poorly presented, primarily devoid of labels identifying the artists or the works’ disconcerting history of institutional defacement and the subsequent redeeming action of repainting them. Furthermore, the SUB paintings are not included in a UNM University Libraries online research guide that highlights public art at UNM.²⁵

Another contested UNM image, which has recently been protested by Native American student groups (primarily Kiva Club and Red Nation), is the official school seal, which is viewed as a representation of the colonization and genocide of Native Americans (fig. 12). Its tricultural motif shows an armed Spanish conquistador, an armed Anglo pioneer, and a stylized bird figure that supposedly represents Native Americans. To Native American activists, the first two figures represent the violence of

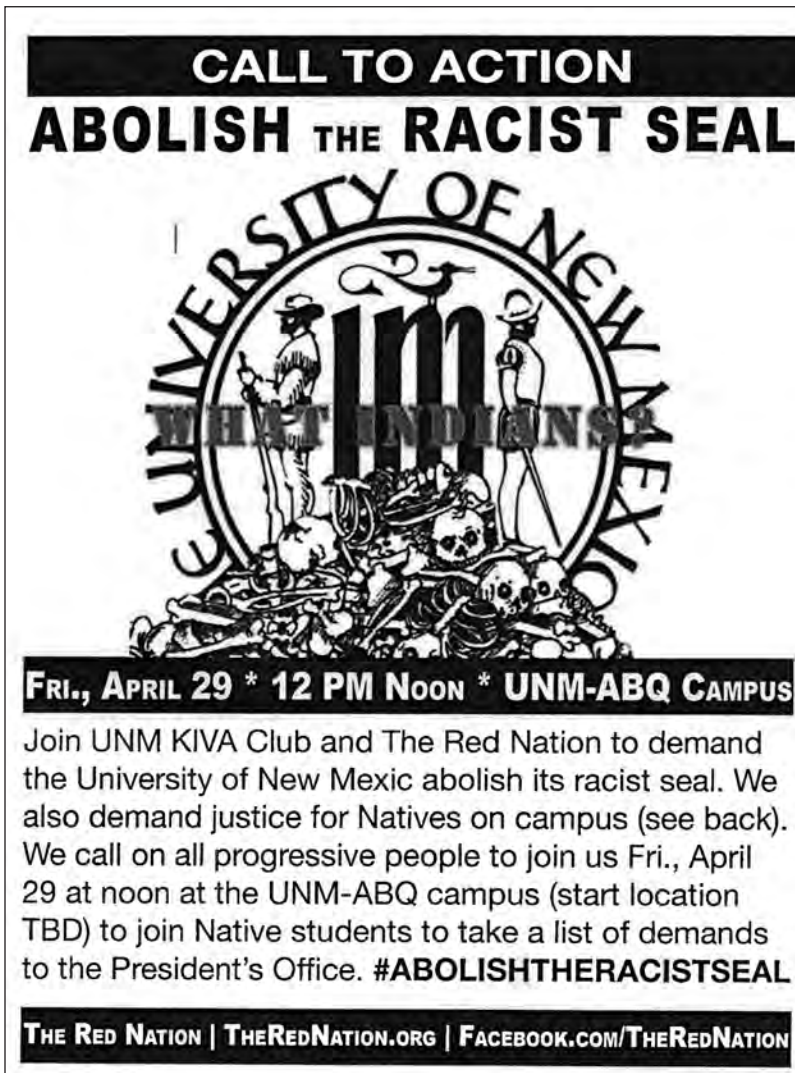


Figure 12. Student call to action, undated. The flyer depicts the University of New Mexico official seal with "What Indians?" and a skulls and bones drawing superimposed. UNM Vertical Files (School banners/UNM seal), Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.

colonialism, while the bird figure is viewed as dehumanizing and erasing the Native American people. Their campaign caught the attention of UNM officials and regents, who agreed to suspend use of the seal upon further

review. This same campaign also included opposition to the Adams paintings. One of the groups' eleven demands, contained in an open letter titled "Abolish the Racist Seal" and delivered to the UNM president on April 29, 2016, mentions the Adams paintings under the demand "Abolition of Racist Imagery and Cultural Appropriation."²⁶ Alicia Romero, a Chicana postdoctoral fellow at the UNM Division for Equity and Inclusion, joined with these Native American students and addressed the UNM Board of Regents on May 5, 2016. Romero stated, "I ask all in attendance to weigh the importance of upholding divisive symbols that cause grief, trauma, and distress to many in our academic, local, and regional communities over the opportunity to create emblems celebrating the value that diversity—in its many forms—brings; symbols that uplift, unite, and underscore inclusivity and equity at the University of New Mexico."²⁷

Conclusion

Student activism at UNM has been intermittent yet unfailing in its reaction to racism and sexism as embodied in recurrent political philosophies and regimes—including the contemporary reemergence of populist white nationalism. This essay, drawing largely on primary sources, has laid out a timeline of historical racial discourse and long-standing minority-led discontentment and activism at the University of New Mexico. Much of this protest has been directed toward the Adams paintings as a central symbolic representation of the notions of Anglo-American and male supremacy and perpetuation of the tricultural myth.

This activism, which began with the 1970 Las Chicanas letter and other student opinion pieces, went on to include two defacings, multiple student rallies and protests, and finally MEChA's and the Mural Coalition's struggles in 1993–95 to use student government and administrative channels to rectify both the Chicano murals' destruction and the Adams paintings issue. Despite the persistence of these efforts, they were not successful overall in forcing tangible change. Although MEChA and the Mural Coalition were able to get the SUB murals repainted on canvas, their diligent and articulate efforts (along with those of other student groups) to resolve concerns about the Adams paintings did not result in any concrete action or compromises on the part of the UNM administration. Almost eighty years since the four panels were painted, and after forty years of periodic protest, the Adams works are still exhibited in the library's Great Hall, with no official plaque, signage, or counternarrative discussing the

controversy or past activism. The reconstructed large-canvas Chicano paintings remain displayed in the Student Union Building, but they are largely obscured and forgotten.²⁸

Nevertheless, from 1970 through 1995 the students manifested bold activism, and their efforts must not be considered a failure, for they set the standard for future mobilization. They also helped identify patterns in the university administration's actions or inactions. The frustrations and obstacles the students faced were best expressed by Neri Holguin, the lead Mural Coalition activist, who summarized the administration's stance in dealing with this issue: "For more than 30 years many students have struggled to get something done about the murals in the Zimmerman Library. When this old issue comes up, it is not addressed by the administration. Is it to be believed that for 30 years, students were just working the wrong channels?" (*New Mexico Daily Lobo*, October 19, 1994). Yet despite Holguin's critique of the administration's inaction and her persistent decrying of the bureaucratic roadblocks, she continued to call for administrative action. In November 1994 she stated, "Racism should be addressed by UNM as an institution—not just by student groups" (*New Mexico Daily Lobo*, November 8, 1994).

This history of UNM campus activism raises theoretical issues of relevance to the wider spectrum of anticolonial, antiracist, and antisexist movements as they relate to public art. First, the continued acceptance of the Adams paintings, which depict normalized cultural relations between certain populations while omitting others, is an ahistoricism of 300 years of Spanish imperial domination, US invasion and cultural imposition, and native resistance. Second, the continued prominent exhibition of these paintings reinforces the "seeing man" syndrome, which accepts the beneficence of white male authority as normal and unquestioned. Lastly, the decades-long refusal of university authorities to take action in response to the many articulate student protests and proposals for dealing with the paintings speaks to the continued stratification of power, influence, and control, evoking age-old settler colonial relations in the university setting today.

Notes

1. *Three Peoples* consists of four panels that are generally referred to as a mural. I describe them as paintings, however, because in the Mexican and Chicano mural movement or tradition, the term “mural” implies that the work was painted directly onto the wall surface, becoming a permanent part of the architecture, and that the artist interacted with the space and with the public while creating the work. Also, the Mexican and Chicano mural movement expresses a strong social and political message, primarily from the perspective of the oppressed. Contrary to these precepts, the Adams paintings were created with oil paint on canvas offsite and then affixed to the walls while the library was closed during spring break of 1940 (although most writings incorrectly give the installation year as 1939). They are devoid of any perspective from contemporaneous native New Mexicans.

2. “Degrees Conferred by UNM: Dataset” (2018), compiled by Amy E. Winter and Mary C. Wise, UNM Digital Repository, http://digitalrepository.unm.edu/ulls_sp/3.

3. “Attitude toward Natively Spanish-speaking People of the Southwest,” box 1, folder 3, Richard Martin Page Papers, Center for Southwest Research (CSWR), University Libraries, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque (UNMA).

4. In 1938 a commission was formed to initiate a statewide celebration and recognition of the 400th anniversary of Francisco Vázquez de Coronado’s expedition into New Mexico, to be held in 1940. Zimmerman was the first president of this commission.

5. National Register of Historic Places registration form for the Zimmerman Library, US Department of the Interior, August 22, 2016, <https://www.nps.gov/nr/feature/places/pdfs/16000549.pdf>.

6. 1930 US Federal Censuses, Albuquerque City, New Mexico, population schedule, University of New Mexico, Roma Ave., enumeration district 1-52, sheet 19, dwelling 500, family 507, enumerator L. R. Charles, digital image, Ancestry.com: FHL microfilm: 2341127, accessed January 22, 2018, citing US Bureau of the Census. *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration. 1940 US Federal Censuses, Albuquerque City, New Mexico, population schedule, University of New Mexico, Roma Ave., enumeration district 1-8, sheet 10B, dwelling 1901, family 1, enumerator John M. Cheshire; digital image, Ancestry.com: accessed January 22, 2018, citing US Bureau of the Census. *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940*. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration.

7. Beverly “Beva” Sanchez Padilla, telephone conversation with the author, October 30, 2016. Sanchez was one of the Las Chicanas activists and is now a renowned poet and community leader.

8. The *New Mexico Lobo* became the *New Mexico Daily Lobo* in 1971. An archive of back issues is available in the UNM Digital Repository at https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/daily_lobo/.

9. Felipe Gonzales and Terry Gugliotta, *The Three Peoples of New Mexico: Art in Controversy*, pamphlet, March 1990, Vargas Project Papers (MSS 870), box 1, folder 89, CSWR and CSWR vertical files.

10. UNM Board of Regents minutes, December 12, 2000, CSWR, UNMA.
11. "Zimmerman Library Murals Rally, 1993," video by UNM Oral History Program, Center for Regional Studies, <https://libvideo.unm.edu/?q=node/417>.
12. Senate Resolutions, 1992–93, box 11, folder 109-9, ASUNM Acc.109, CSWR, UNMA.
13. Mural Coalition Records, UNMA 021 (one folder), CSWR, UNMA.
14. Laura Montoya, conversation with the author, August 2017.
15. Mural Coalition Records, CSWR, UNMA.
16. Mural Coalition minutes, June 17, 1994, Mural Coalition Records, CSWR, UNMA.
17. A plaque mounted on the wall next to the *Indigenous Pueblo* mural lists the original artists as Ike S. Davis III, Jerry Rael, Rigo Romero, Jorge Lovato, Monica Sánchez, and José Ojeda-Molina. The restoration artists are listed as Ike S. Davis III, and Jerry Rael, and the student artists are John Montoya, Adrian Martínez, Nicole Maés, Anders Nilsen, Tsuya Tai-Chin Austin, Mansur Nurullah, Joaquin Arguello, Antonio Vigil, Lorna Meyer, Melissa Chávez, and Tammi Lambert. The plaque also gave special thanks to the following: UNM Mural Coalition, Black Student Union, Hispanic Student Services, Student Union Building, Student Affairs, MECHA, Arts and Sciences, and ASUNM.
18. The repainting of these murals is documented in *Rebirth of a Mural*, pictorial booklet, 1994, SUB Mural Project, box 97, folder 60, Facilities Planning, CSWR, UNMA.
19. Mural Coalition Records, CSWR, UNMA.
20. Ibid.
21. University of New Mexico Board of Regents Records 011, box 19, CSWR, UNMA.
22. UNM Board of Regents minutes, February 14, 1995, CSWR, UNMA.
23. "WWbhd? Or, What would bell hooks do regarding the Kenneth Adams murals in the Zimmerman Library, University of New Mexico," Steve Stockdale personal blog, June 2010, posted January 22, 2018 at <http://stevestockdale.com/wwbhd/>.
24. "Muraling Myths: A Qualitative Research Prospectus," Steve Stockdale personal blog, Fall 2010, posted January 22, 2018 at <http://stevestockdale.com/muraling-myths/>. The survey Stockdale proposed was never put into place. Stockdale forwarded to me the email dialogue he had with Dean Martha Bedard.
25. "Public Art at UNM: Writing and Research," University Libraries, UNM, http://libguides.unm.edu/publicart/unm_examples.
26. "Abolish the Racist Seal: An Open Letter to UNM Administration," April 26, 2016, <https://therednation.org/2016/04/26/abolish-the-racist-seal-an-open-letter-to-unm-administration/>.
27. Alicia Romero informed this campaign against the seal as a facilitator and mediator between students and the UNM administration, and as a historian. See Romero (2017).
28. Although there has never been counternarrative art in the library located near the Adams paintings, there is a set of culturally relevant murals painted in the Indigenous Nations Library Program rooms located on the second floor of the Zimmerman Library.

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