



Roots, Raíces, שורשים

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Integrative Project Thesis
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For my Integrative Project I explored my cross-cultural family history, and then designed posters to represent the narratives. I am interested in ethnicity and multi-ethnicity, and I wanted to look further into these topics and incorporate the knowledge I gained into my project. My intentions for the project were to learn about graphic design from various locations and time periods, enhance my own design skills, learn new techniques and styles in design, while exploring how and why my family left Eastern Europe to go to Mexico. I sought to portray family anecdotes as examples of immigrant life and familial relationships in general. My goal was to use my personal family history as an example of how cultures mix and how they differ. I gathered information from old photographs and stories about family members that stood out in my memory. Different questions propelled my thinking, such as; How was life different for my family in Europe than in Mexico? What was the visual language like where they were? How can I visually portray different tones in the posters I design? How does our ethnicity/multi-ethnicity impact us? And how does family impact self-identity?

The photographer Rafael Goldchain also explores the connection between identity and family in his work, which further inspired me to address these themes. His book, *I Am My Family*, includes portraits and text about his family history. Goldchain's project was prompted by questions



Goldchain, Rafael. "Self-Portrait as Naftuli Goldszajn." Photo. *Jewcy.com* 2008. 8 December 2009 < http://www.jewcy.com/carousels/interview_rafael_goldchain >



Goldchain, Rafael. "Self-Portrait as Leizer Goldszajn." Photo. *Jewcy.com* 2008. 8 December 2009 < http://www.jewcy.com/carousels/interview_rafael_goldchain >

similar to mine, such as "How do you visually articulate cultural hybridity? How do history and memory produce images that are foundational in a person's identity? How [does he] construct a firm sense of identity for [his] young son, based on many aspects, one of which most importantly being family history?" (Guber). These questions directly address the topics of multi-ethnicity, family history, and self-identity.

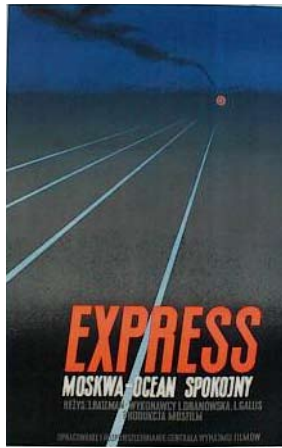
I began my project by making a list of the possible locations and time periods that are relevant to my family history, and that could determine the content of the posters. I assigned the tone of each poster based on what the specific location meant to my family and what their incentives for leaving Europe were. The poster telling stories from World War II Poland, for example, has a gloomy and dark tone because my grandfather is a holocaust survivor. In contrast, the Mexico



My grandmother Joan's paternal great-grandfather. Photo taken circa 1850.



Trepkowski, Tadeusz. "Train and Flag 1934." Poster. *Freedomonthefence.com* 2009. 18 January 2010 < <http://freedomonthefence.com/history>>



Trepkowski, Tadeusz. "Express Moskwa-Ocean Spokojny." Poster. *Raraavis.krakow.pl* 2009. < <http://www.raraavis.krakow.pl/Katalog87/a87-05plakaty.htm> >



poster is colorful and happy because of my family's relationship to the country. Although there are many aspects of Mexico that are quite the opposite, such as poverty and crime, for my family, it is the country that opened its arms when there was nowhere else to go. For my family and me, Mexico is a symbol of life, family, and perseverance.

I then searched for historical examples of graphics from the individual locations and periods on my list. For example, I looked at graphics from the

Polish poster movement because my paternal grandfather was born in Poland and left after surviving the war. I conducted research in library books, online databases, search engines, and the posters in the University of Michigan's special collections library. I was able to gain knowledge about design through researching and referencing these historical examples. Before designing a poster on the computer, I began by sketching some ideas. I drew from the typography and color of the examples that I collected, and incorporated them into my initial design. I then created two or three rough thumbnails of different ideas for the poster, one of which I would continue to refine. Finally, when I felt that it was resolved, I would take a break from the poster before revising and then printing it.

The first poster that I designed portrays the narrative of how my grandfather survived during the holocaust. The caption accompanying the poster explains how he and his father, brother, and sister were able to survive by jumping off of the cart taking them to the Treblinka concentration camp, and then finding refuge in a hole underneath a barn for twenty-two months. The main image in the poster is a photograph, taken about eleven years ago, of the barn where my family hid. There is also an image of the train going into the distance towards death, which is represented by the red sun-like shape behind the train. It was important for this poster to have a serious and dark tone in order to fully convey the situation in the narrative. The poster reads, "Polska. Visit Treblinka. No reservations required." The text

mimics what would normally be written on a travel poster because it has the country/city in large letters at the bottom and information about reservations and where to visit below. It is meant to be a political and satirical comment on the situation at the time because no one would want to visit Treblinka or need reservations to go. The text aims to provoke the viewer to question what they are reading and why I chose to put it on the poster.

The next poster I designed symbolizes of my maternal grandmother's family. For this poster I looked at historical examples of 1910-1920's London Underground posters. During the early 20th century, the Underground commissioned many designers to create images to be displayed in the subway tunnels and stations. This modern technology became an avenue for many designers to display work and for design to become even more embedded in daily life. I chose to draw inspiration from these posters because my great-grandmother and her family were from London. My great-grandmother, Chava (Yvonne) Miller Schabes, studied piano at the Conservatory of Music in London, and sometimes played piano during silent movies. The primary image in the "Visit London" poster is of a piano because my great-grandfather, Sam (Shimshon) Schabes Spindler, bought her a piano as an engagement present. This piano then belonged to their daughter Lillian (Reyna), my grandmother, and was eventually passed down to my cousin Susana, who is the pianist in the family. The background consists of a collage of photographs including, Yvonne and Shimshon's wedding photograph,

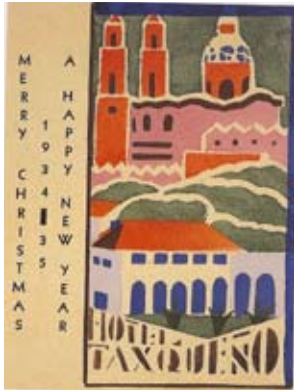


Paine, Charles. "Kingston by Tram." Poster. *LTMcollection.org* 2007. 18 February 2010 <<http://www.ltmcollection.org/posters/artist/artist.html?IXartist=Charles+Paine>>

Johnson, F. Roberts. "St James Park." Poster. *LTMcollection.org* 2007. 18 February 2010 <http://www.ltmcollection.org/posters/results/results.html?_IXSR_=rc0m3dECR_g&_IXSESSION_=0TfVNrXqX9z&_IXsearch=james&_IXFIRST_=21&_IXpage=2>

my grandmother at one year old, my great-great grandparents, and a photograph of my grandmother with her mother. The text layered over the wedding photo comes from a caption written on the back of my grandmother's baby photo written by her mother, Yvonne. It reads, "To my beloved grandparents. All my love." I chose to reflect an image of lightning onto the piano to indicate the reason that they left London. My great-great grandfather, Harry Miller, fell ill and his doctor told him to leave cold and rainy London and go on vacation to a warm place, so he went to Mexico. He fell in love with the country and decided to stay. Harry told his wife Yetta that he was going to stay and she could join him if she wanted. Three years later, she and their daughters joined him in Mexico.





“Mexico and modern printmaking : a revolution in the graphic arts, 1920 to 1950.” John W. Ittman. Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2006.



Wyman, Lance. “Mexico 1968 Olympic Games, logotype and identity system.” Design and Photos. *Designboom.com* 2000. 4 March 2010 <http://www.designboom.com/weblog/read.php?CATEGORY_PK=&TOPIC_PK=2616>



The third poster illustrates my paternal grandmother’s, Joan Sourasky Brzezinski, childhood growing up in Mexico. This poster is happy and bright because she describes Mexico as a great place to grow up when she was a girl. When my grandmother was a girl her mother opened a furniture store, Tip Top on the corner of Insurgentes and Teotihuacan in Mexico City, and her family lived in the apartment above the store. The “Mexico” poster depicts this building with the Popocatepetl volcano (which is commonly associated with and can be seen from many

places in the city) in the background. As a young girl my grandmother had a dog named Nellie who would walk her and her sister to school everyday. They would walk three blocks to the American school, and Nellie would stand in front of the girls so that they would not cross the street when there was traffic. Once the cars stopped, she would move out of the way so that the girls could cross the street, then Nellie would walk home. When Nellie died, my grandmother got a Pekinese named Puffy. My grandmother recalls that she and Puffy would walk to get ice cream, and then share a scoop. I chose to illustrate a dog in the poster since they are one of the more prominent memories of my grandmother’s childhood. I drew inspiration from the designs for the 1968 Olympic games in Mexico City, as well as other graphics from early in the century. The 1968 Olympics has been greatly praised as one of the most successful examples of graphic design for integrating Mexican pre-Hispanic and folk art with the op-art kinetic type style that was typical of the 1960’s. This cohesion is perfectly embodied in the concentric parallel lines of the game’s logotype. Lance Wyman, the graphic designer for the games, explains that, “color and Mexico are synonymous... Color helped transform the 1968 Summer Olympic Games into a Mexican fiesta” (Yew). I wanted to follow along the same lines by using colors that reminded me of Mexico and modeling the image of the dog in the style of pre-Hispanic art and symbols.

My maternal grandfather, Boris Margolin, grew up in Puebla and later studied chemical engineering at the Universidad Autonoma de Puebla. Because

I did not get to know him very well, the “Puebla” poster represents what my mother (who also grew up in Puebla) told me about her father. The tiles in the poster mirror the style of traditional ceramics called *talavera*. Puebla has been well known for this type of artwork for many years, which continues to be very popular today. I wanted each tile to be a different pattern of talavera and serve as a small fragment of what I know about my grandfather. One tile has a beaker because my grandfather was a chemical engineer, and my mother claims that she was interested in math and science because of her father. Another tile has a bowling ball and pins to represent the bowling alley that my grandfather had when my mother was growing up in Puebla. When my mom was a girl she and her family would often go to watch the *Puebla Pericos* baseball games because her father loved baseball. When my grandfather and uncle played baseball my mother was the catcher. She explained to me that she used to hate baseball, but she came to love it because it was something that her family did together. The tile with the baseball field is significant because baseball continues to be a big part of our lives, and it connects us with my grandfather. The final tile has a sun, which is a very common symbol in Mexican art. It was also important in this poster because my grandfather invented one of the first recipes for sunscreen. When he was unable to sell it successfully on his own, he sold the recipe to *Johnson and Johnson*.

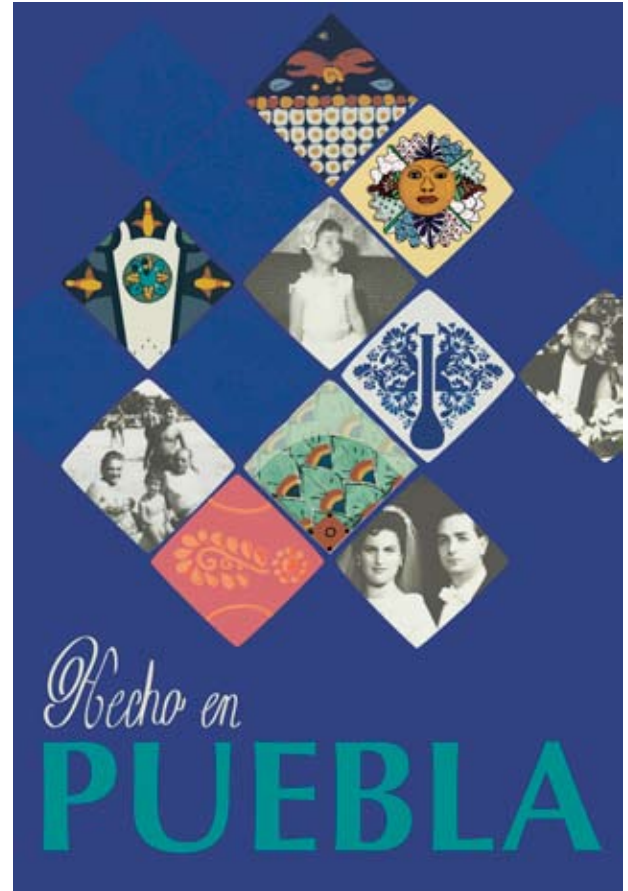
The poster of the tree is a summary of the themes that are evident throughout the project. The project culminates with the poster of the

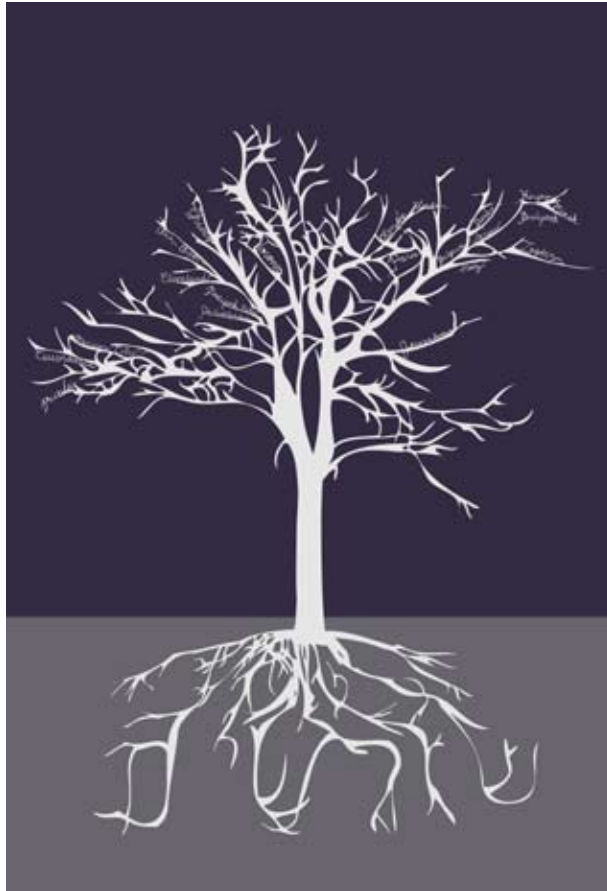


“Talavera Tiles.” Ceramic. *Allnaturalstonetile.com* 2008. 3 March 2010 <<http://www.allnaturalstonetile.com/amazon-sales/buy-mexican-talavera-tiles/>>



“Talavera Sun Face.” Ceramic. *Yesweareopen.net* 2010. 1 March 2010 <http://yesweareopen.net/shopping/index.php?main_page=product_info&products_id=9>





tree, which summarizes the themes that are the connecting thread through the posters. The branches of the tree have the names of all of the cities that my family members have lived or traveled through to get from Europe to Mexico, from Minsk and Paris to Chicago and New York City. Because this tree is a representation of my family tree, including myself, I also included the places that I have lived. I placed the cities in approximate correct geographical proximity to one another, but also made sure that they fit well with the shape of the tree. The branches in

the poster embody how my ancestors' diverse cultures crossed paths and intertwined with one another when they brought their Jewish traditions and languages with them to Mexico. This tree symbolizes the unique combination of cultures that is carried on through my sister and me. Although the branches of my family tree stem from different parts of the world, they are connected by my Jewish roots. This is illustrated in the roots of the tree in the poster, which spell שורשים (pronounced *shorashim*, meaning "roots" in Hebrew).

Family history plays a very important role in self-identity for me. Growing up I spoke Spanish not English, my favorite food was enfrijoladas, and I traveled to Mexico once a year, not to go to the beach (to many people's surprise), but to visit family. My somewhat rare dual ethnicity of Jewish and Mexican has affected my life and how I identify myself. My point of view in many issues, such as politics, immigration, and culture has been greatly affected by the fact that I was born in a different country, and that I have been exposed to different cultures.

Our experiences and ethnicities to a large extent shape who we are and how we think. My project aims to address the problem or stereotypes and racism by promoting tolerance. My project does this through educating others by providing an example of a multi-ethnic family whose racial classification may be unclear, and does not fit into the stereotypes imposed on its ethnicity. More specifically, people often stereotype Mexicans as having dark skin, eyes, and hair, but although

the members of my family have light skin, blue eyes, and light brown hair, we still consider ourselves Mexican. When people first hear me speak Spanish, a long explanation is usually requested as to how I speak so quickly and why I do not have an accent. My project strives to teach that you cannot make assumptions about people based on how they look or what you think their racial affiliation is. Understanding that people's experiences affect their actions and beliefs will help us learn how to communicate with each other more successfully and overcome segregation and discrimination.



My grandmother Joan's maternal grandparents.



My grandmother Reyna's maternal grandfather.

Thank you to my family and friends for their ongoing support through this project. I could not have done it without you.



Final Posters on display with labels below. Located in Robbins Gallery at the University of Michigan School of Art & Design.



People viewing my work in the gallery.

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