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SPAN 365: The Chicano Novel

Critical Essay

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*Desert Blood*

The novel *Desert Blood: The Juarez Murders* by Alicia Gaspar De Alba touches on many serious topics and themes that can enrage the people who read it. With certain themes, some people may not be able to connect on a personal level as they are not able to relate to the situation well enough. However, there are other themes that readers can connect to personally, such as the novel's theme of corruption and power abuse. Corruption and the abuse of power is something all people have experiences at some point in their lives in one form or another. It can come in many forms, whether in the government or in the media, and this novel touches on several aspects of it.

The main form of corruption in *Desert Blood* comes in the form of government corruption in both the Mexican city of Juarez and in the United States. One of the signs of government corruption in the novel, is where Ivon and William are handing out fliers in Juarez looking for Ivon's sister, Irene. During this time, after asking around the neighborhood for a while, two police officers arrest them. These officers charge them with selling drugs and goes as far as planting evidence in Ivon's bag (pg. 214). This is just one of the things that these corrupt officers do while they have Ivon and William under arrest.

Before they are put into the police vehicle, they are patted down. One officer takes all of William's money, his driver's license, and credit cards. While the other one inappropriately touches Ivon on the chest (pg. 213). These acts alone show just how corrupt the government there is. For the fact that these officers have so much power and authority that they are able to abuse it and can wrongly accuse people for crimes that they did not make. More importantly, the novel points out that these types of behavior are common among the authorities of Juarez, when Ivon says:

*These pigs hauling them out of Casa Colorada were not just ordinary cops-these were state police, judiciales. Bribes and blow jobs would be the least of what she was going to have to do to get of this one. (pg. 213)*

In this instant, Ivon had also remembered the time when she was younger when she had to perform oral sex on a cop to get out of going to jail (pg. 213) The favors that are expected in this type of situation shows the police in Juarez don't care about keeping crime off the street or protecting innocent people unless they can get something out of it.

In addition to that, these officers do not seem to care the Ivon is looking for her missing sister in Juarez when hundreds of other young women had disappeared and been found murdered. This shows that there is something wrong with the police force in Mexico, as they are so corrupt that they are not willing to even pretend to care about the situation of their city. The novel referred to the fact the police are destroying evidence of the murders and covering the act by saying the neighboring college was complaining the smell (pg. 48). The character Rubi's response to this by saying "They make up a lot of lies around here (pg. 49)." Suggesting that these types of cover ups and disregards to the crimes is common.

However, the corruption of government is not just on Mexico's side of the border. The character J.W. who the Chief Detention Enforcement Officer, also corrupted his authority by taking advantage of his powers. J.W. despite being an officer was involved in very serious crimes in both Juarez and El Paso, and even was involved in Ivon's sister's disappearance. He abuses his ability to cross the border to smuggle illegal materials and his authority as Captain to make sure no one is ever suspicious about his involvement in crimes. Throughout the novel, his alias "The Lone Ranger" is mentioned, as he was the one who rammed his truck into Ivon's cousin's, Ximena, car because she was trying to help search for the bodies of the missing women (pg. 181). His truck was also the one that Irene parked behind at the fairgrounds (pg. 100) before she went missing. J.W. was connect to many of the crimes that were happening in Juarez, but his position as a high ranked American officer is what allowed him to escape without being caught in the end.

Corruption can be found anywhere, not just within the government, but within the media. When media sources decide not to give the full story and withhold information, or decide not to even cover a story, it is the abuse and corruption of their powers to keep people in the dark. Government, sometimes, can play a part in the withholding of information. However, other times it can be he corruption within the media source. Sometimes it is done to keep people from panicking, other times it can be because the media doesn't believe it is an important issue that needs awareness.

The first sign of media corruption in the novel is in the beginning of the novel as Ivon is first learning about what is happening in the town across the border of her hometown. In the years that Ivon is away from her hometown of El Paso, she has never once heard anything about the crimes that were happening so close the United States, despite there being hundreds of

missing and murder women from the same town (pg. 3). Ivon is upset that she never once heard of the crimes, not from the media nor from her family. It was like these crimes were not important to anyone outside of Juarez. Ximena even states that “nobody’s interested. People think of it as Juarez news, not El Paso... (pg. 230).” It is interesting to see how even the people of El Paso don’t care about what is happening so close to them. If Juarez was not on the other side of border, people might take the situation more seriously. However, because it is a Mexican town, that automatically makes it Mexico’s problem and not El Paso’s or the United States.

While most big media sources are not covering the story in either Mexico or the United States, it is up to smaller, more independent sources to act, such as Rubi Reyna. She covers the story for her talk show and provides information that is not given out normally. However, in this novel even independent media sources are out of their own gain. Towards the end of novel, it is shown that even Rubi was willing to cover and hid evidence so she could save herself and her family (pg. 313-314) rather than allow people to know. She was more concern about her reputation and her family than the hundreds of women that had fallen victim in Juarez.

The corruption and abuse of power in the government and in the media, is very prevalent in the novel. It is done for personal gain, satisfaction, and to protect oneself rather than the victims. There are many themes throughout *Desert Blood* that are powerful. However, the theme of corruption and power abuse is a real-life problem that many people do not realize is even happening.