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Blood and Sand

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Bullfighting and other *fiestas taurinas* – which literally translates to festivals of bulls – are a tradition brought to Mexico and other Latin American countries during the Conquistas of the 1500's. Since then, they have had a long and celebrated history as one of the most iconic symbols of Mexican culture and tradition.

In Mexico, bullfights are still a cultured sport and for some, a commodity. Mexico remains one of eight countries in the world where bullfighting is legal and in Mexico City, bullfights are a celebrated sport televised weekly by the largest mass media corporation in Latin America, Televisa. Each bullfight takes place in Plaza Mexico, the largest bullfighting ring in the world with a capacity to sit over 40,000 spectators. The televised bullfights are an organized sport with a five-month season, which takes place from November to March on an annual basis. The five-month season consists of six weekly *corridos*, all taking place on Sunday afternoons between 4:30pm and 8 pm.

A *corrida* is a bout between a bullfighter and bull. The bout is composed of three acts that can last anywhere from 20 to 45 minutes. Each bout is considered a performance between the bullfighter and the bull but always ends with the death of the bull. During the *corrida* a pre-selected bull is released into the arena and persuaded to attack a bullfighter by waving a large cape or *capote*. The first act begins once the bull and the bullfighter are acquainted. One of two *picadores* – men on horseback wielding lances with a sharp edge – enters the arena and stabs the bull in the neck. The wound releases enough blood to prevent the bull from lifting his head properly, going into cardiac arrest or having a heart attack.

The second act begins once the *picador* exits the arena. It begins with assistant bullfighters, known as *banderilleros*, luring the animal close enough to stab six *banderillas* along its shoulder muscles. A *banderilla* is a short and decorated dart with a sharp hook at the tip that serves similar purposes as a fish hook. When the bull moves, the hooks pull back the skin and sometimes penetrate deeper into the animals' back. The third and final act is the death of the bull, performed by the main bullfighter. The bull is "danced" with until the bullfighter is ready to stab the bull in the back with a silver sword. The sword penetrates the bulls' back and should sever the main artery, causing immediate death. However, the bull does not always die immediately as most young bullfighters are not experienced enough to damage the main arteries of the animal. Consequently, there is rush of assistant bullfighters jumping into the ring to help disorient the bull until it falls to its knees. Once the bull is down another assistant stabs the bulls' neck with a small dagger, inflicting immediate death. The bull is then dragged out of the arena by two horses and the arena is cleaned up for a new performance to begin.

Once all three acts are complete the judges of the plaza and the spectators judge the bullfighter. If a bullfighter has delivered an exceptional performance he may be awarded one or two of the bulls' ears, a tail and, in some occasions, the entire bust of the dead bull.

The bulls used for *corridos* are especially bred to fight in arenas. Before any bullfight begins the bulls are pre-selected during an auction between a bullfighter's agents and the ranchers that raise the bulls.

Today, there are hundreds of Mexicans who want to put an end to the age-old tradition and ban bullfights in Mexico City. Among them is a fairly new animal right's group known as Anima Naturalis. For the past five years, Anima Naturalis has funded a campaign to end bullfighting and spearheaded a large annual manifestation. The protest takes place every year on the weekend closest to the anniversary of Plaza Mexico, February 5.

This year, the protest took place on the 3rd of February in a large public space known as El Monumento de la Revolución. Anima Naturalis enlisted the help of approximately 700 volunteers, 200 of whom lay semi nude in the concrete area of the plaza forming a large circle. All volunteers lying on the ground were drenched in fake blood to represent the agony of the bulls while another 500 volunteers silently held posters and other anti-bullfighting paraphernalia.

El Partido Verde Ecologista de México (PVEM), Mexico's green party, has also played a controversial role in the proposed ban on bullfights. The PVEM is a relatively young party that has formed a strong relationship with the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), the leading political party in Mexico. Many political commentators and Mexican journalists have commented that the PVEM only has an environmental stand in order to attract more votes to the PRI – classic Mexican corruption scandals.

In the fall 2011, PVEM drafted a piece of legislation to ban bullfights in Mexico City. Since then the capital's legislative assembly has disagreed and struck down the ban twice. In an attempt to ease the path to bullfighting bans, PVEM congressman Jesus Sesma Suarez drafted legislation to arrest, fine and incarcerate all animal right's offenders, with the exception of anyone involved in bullfights or cock fights. The ban was passed in December 2012, effective February 1st of this year.

Source List

- Manolo Mejia Avila, Retired Bullfighter, Mexico City
- Antonio Fanyuti Vidal, President of Anima Naturalis, Mexico City
- Jesus Sesma Suarez, Congressman for Partido Verde Ecologista de Mexico, Mexico City.
- Dolores Rendon, Press Secretary for Jesus Sesma Suarez, Partido Verde Ecologista de Mexico, Mexico City
- Gilberto Garcia Minero, Technical Secretary for the Commission of Partido Verde Ecologista de Mexico
- Alberto Najjar, Journalist for BBC Mundo, Mexico City
- Alan Rodrigo Hernandez Pasten, Journalist for BBC Mundo, Mexico City
- Juan Castañeda, Press Manager, Plaza Monumental de Toros, Mexico City
- *Margarita – Secretary of Press Manager, Plaza Monumnetal de Toros, Mexico City