

Thing explores archival culture by highlighting historic documents, collections, exhibits, and artifacts.

This edition features a selection of May Day Posters from the Center for the Study of Political Graphics in Culver City provided by Executive Director Carol Wells and Archivist Emily Sulzer.

Words by Jennie Freeburg

May Day rallies in Los Angeles drew smaller crowds in 2007 than they did the previous year, 2006's Great American Boycott, when undocumented workers and their supporters refused to work, thereby demonstrating US dependency on the labor of undocumented immigrants.

But the images and footage of the Los Angeles Police Department firing rubber bullets and fighting protesters with batons—recorded on devices in the waning era prior to ubiquitous smart phones—meant that the May Day Melee, as it came to be called when it made international news, would leave the more lasting impression.

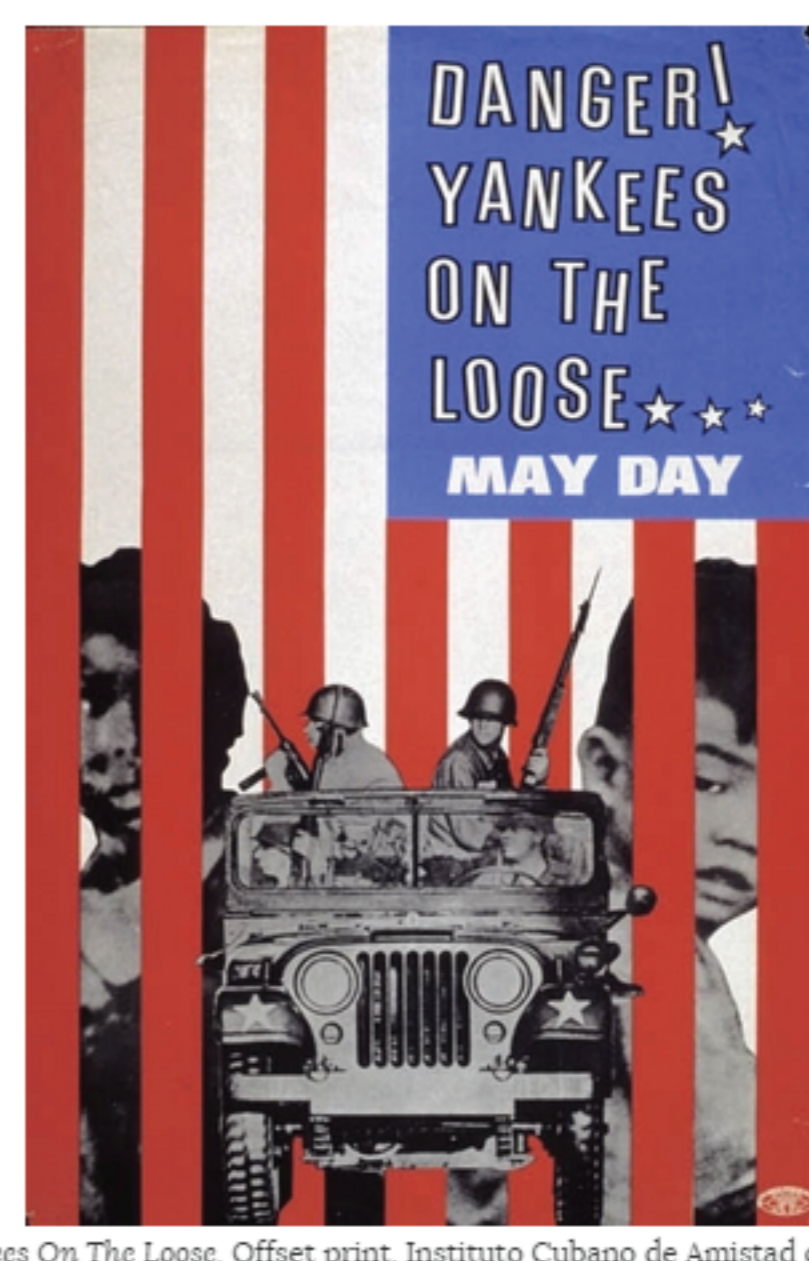
The Haymarket Affair refers to the aftermath of police brutality during labor demonstrations in Chicago for an eight-hour workday. Striking across the country began on May 1, 1886 as workers demanded an “eight-hour day with no cut in pay.” On May 3, 1886, outside Chicago's McCormick Harvesting Machine Company plant, policemen fired shots at striking workers as they gathered, killing two. Anarchists and labor supporters organized a rally the following day against the police violence. Comprised of German, Bohemian, and Irish immigrants, the protesters created and distributed flyers and posters in English and German calling for “Revenge!, Rache!”

When a bomb was thrown at the rally, these posters came to be used as evidence against staff of the Arbeiter-Zeitung after a police raid uncovered them at the newspaper's office. Eight men were convicted of the bombing, four of whom went to the gallows, with a remainder of men eventually pardoned amidst condemnation of the trial in 1893.

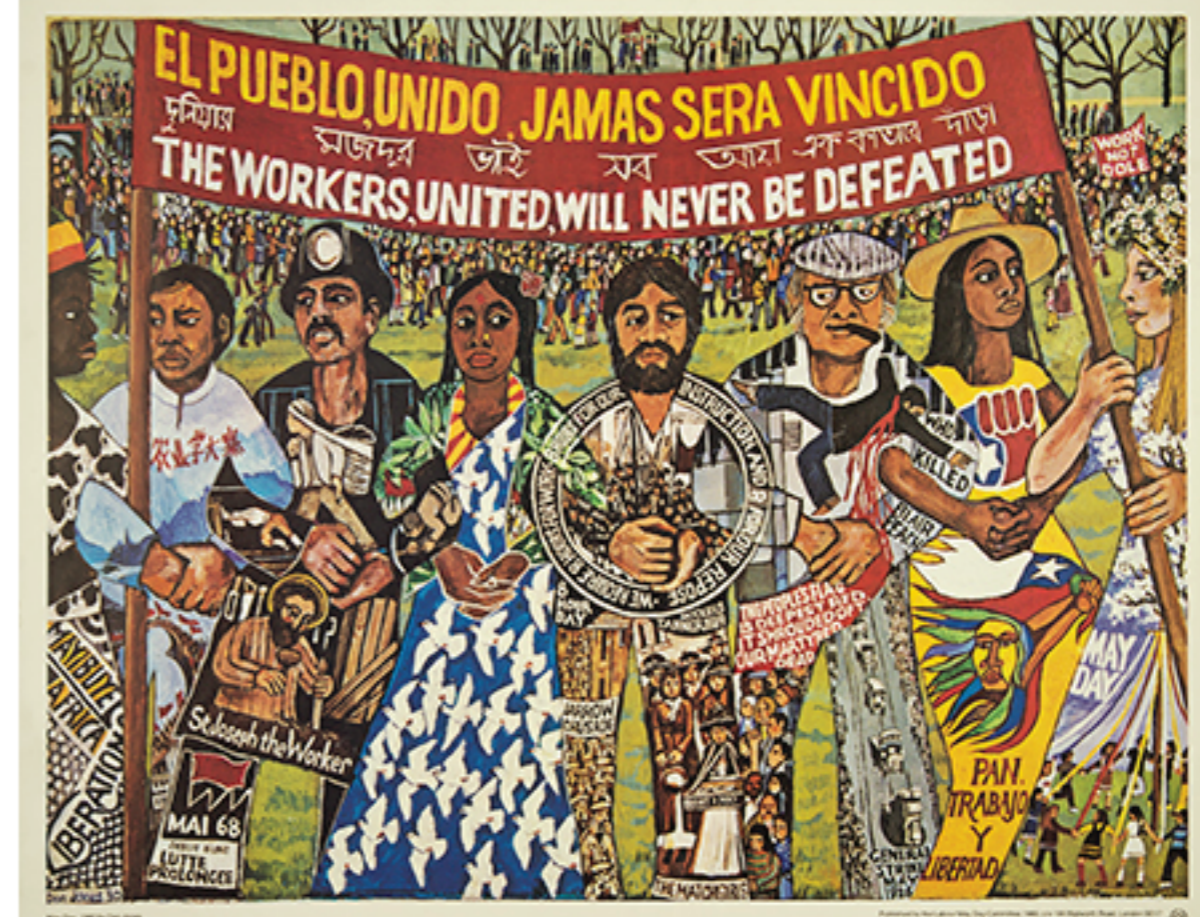
May 1st, 1890 was the first International Workers' Day, when the Second International, an organization of socialist and labor parties formed in Paris, followed the American Federation of Labor's call for renewed May 1st protests demanding an eight-hour workday, in part as commemoration for those who lost their life fighting for the cause in Chicago.



International Workers Day. Offset print. Rachael Romero; San Francisco Poster Brigade; Inkworks; The May 1st Coalition. San Francisco, CA, c. 1979.



Danger! Yankees On The Loose. Offset print. Instituto Cubano de Amistad con Los Pueblos, Cuba, c. 1960s.



El Pueblo, Unido, Jamas Sera Vencido. Offset print. Dan Jones; Interlink Longgraph Ltd. Labour May Day Committee, London, 1980.



Peace-Work. Offset print. General Union of Greek Workers, Greece, 1985.



Free Huey Day. Offset print. Black Panther Party, United States, 1969.



Dia Internacional do Trabalhador. Offset print. Regral, Uniao Nacional dos Trabalhadores Angolanos (UNTA), Angola, 1976.



Solo los Obreros y Campesinos Irán Hasta el Fin. Offset print. Coordinadora Sindical de Nicaragua, Nicaragua, c. 1981.



All The Queers Are Coming Out To May Day! Silkscreen print. Julio Salgado, Oakland, CA, 2014.

May Day continues to be an international celebration and rallying cry for workers, one that is inextricably and historically tied to the causes of socialism, immigrant rights, and the fight against police brutality. As is the case with many grassroots political movements, it is also closely tied to the medium of posters and graphic arts. Images are powerful protest tools, especially in international spheres and communities battling poverty and illiteracy.

Carol A. Wells, executive director of the Center for the Study of Political Graphics, credits the LAPD with galvanizing the political activism and awareness that led her to collect and store thousands of protest posters under her bed, and with those, to eventually found the Center for the Study of Political Graphics in 1989. It was in 1967 Los Angeles, two years after the Watts Riots, that Wells participated in an anti-Vietnam demonstration where police used night-sticks to beat the protestors in an effort to disperse the crowd, only to be commended the following day for reasonably ending the protest after giving the crowd fair warning.



Primero de Mayo de 1947. Linocut. Pablo O'Higgins; Taller de Gráfica Popular (TGP), Mexico, 1947.



1º Maio. Offset print. Ministério da Informação, Mozambique, c. 1980.



May Day 2014. Digital print. Melanie Cervantes; Dignidad Rebelde; AFL-CIO, United States, 2014.

The Center for the Study of Political Graphics houses over 85,000 protest graphics collected through donation and representing struggles and issues across political spectrums, languages, and geographies, with an emphasis on human rights issues, and Los Angeles-specific subjects. The Center has generously provided Los Angeles Archivists Collective with a digital selection of international May Day posters spanning the past six decades.