

GIFTS OF THE SPANISH

by Pablo Ricardo de Quintana

This is the third installment of the reasons why the United States of America is as much Spanish as it is English. In the first, the crucial role Spain and Galvez played in the American Revolution was shown. In the second, I explained how the land is Spanish. Now, it is necessary to demonstrate the profound influence that the Spanish have had on the American culture through their contributions to it.

*This influence can be seen in the place-names of America. Of the fifty state names, twelve have English roots, nine are Spanish, one French and the rest are indigenous. Spanish-named cities can be seen from Pensacola, San Agustin, Saint Louis and Saint Joseph in the East to San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego in the West. In between are Santa Fe, Alburquerque and Pueblo, among others. There are the Sierra Nevada, the Sangre de Cristos, the Rio Grande and countless other Spanish-named landmarks. A goodly portion of the English language has been added from the Spanish and the Nahuatl languages. Words such as lariat (*faja reata*), rodeo, macho, chile, enchilada, chaps (*chuparreras*), dude (*lo dudo*) and hoosegow (*jusgado*) can be found in any dictionary. But, we are getting ahead of ourselves.*

*When the colonists arrived in New Mexico in 1598, they brought with them what they felt would be needed in the new land and which had never before been seen there. They brought cattle, horses, donkeys, sheep, pigs, barnyard fowl, the cat to control rodents and other animals. They brought wheat, grape vines, new vegetables, new strains of corn, chile, spices, herbs, roses, lilacs, indigo and other garden plants, fruit, medicinal and other trees. They brought the wheel, the windlass, household furniture and tools such as the hammer, saw, ax, nails, the scythe, the flail and the plow. They brought new skills and techniques for working the land, metallurgy, metal smithing, wineries, sugar making, soap boiling, spinning and weaving, improved methods of irrigation and countless others to make life bearable. (So deeply have these gifts to the Indians become imbedded in their lives that they now claim that they have always had them. The Navajos speak of their native churro sheep. *Buhuelos* are called Indian frybread. And so on.) In architecture, they introduced the arch, and adobe (the pueblos prior to this had been built with stone). These were the physical gifts the Spanish brought, but these were not the most important, for they also introduced new concepts.*



*The first priority of the Spanish people in the New World was the salvation of the souls of the indigenous peoples. For that, they introduced Christianity. The good Catholic fathers knew that, in order to evangelize, they would need to care for the sick, introducing hospital clinics, and to instruct; so they established schools and introduced education. With it came European civilization, government and the rule of law .. The first university was established in Mexico City in 1533. The printing press began publishing in Mexico City in 1538. The first music school and the first organ in the continental United states were introduced at San Felipe Pueblo in 1609 by Father Cristóbal Quinones. And, with education, came the creation of a *lingua franca* for all these peoples who had heretofore spoken many disparate languages. Spanish would become the common tongue of the American West.*

Next in importance was the establishment of the *pax hispana*. Prior to the coming of the Spanish, the Indians had been in the process of destroying each other through constant warfare. The Acomas had been reduced from ten villages to one by the time the Spanish arrived. The Isletas and others were terrified of the Acomas and Zunis. (Awatovi and Pecos Pueblos were destroyed by Indian attacks.) One chief even mentioned how glad he was of the arrival of the Spanish if it would put an end to this warfare ... as it did. Peace was established. In contrast to their treatment at the hands of the English, the Indians were given Spanish citizenship and their lands were guaranteed by the Spanish system of *mercedes* or land grants. Not only were the Pueblos saved from each other but, through mutual assistance, the Hispanos reduced the depredations of other warlike tribes such as the Navajos, the Apaches, the Pawnee and the Comanches. Once a peace pact was established by de Anza, the Comanches would become allies, protecting the Eastern frontier. The Spanish were inveterate explorers, mapmakers and trailblazers. America was mapped by them. The Camino Real, the Santa Fe Trail, and the Old Spanish Trail among others, were all blazed by Spaniards. Landmarks like the Mississippi River (Rio del Espiritu Santo), the Colorado River, the Grand Canyon and the Painted Desert were discovered by Spaniards. (They say that Zebulon Pike discovered Pike's Peak, but it had already been named *El Capitan*. Similarly, Captain Cook is credited with the discovery of the Hawaiian Islands. The fact that Fernando de Magallanes discovered it in 1521 and descendants of the Spanish were already living there when Cook arrived, does not seem to phase American and British historians much.)

With peace came the beginnings of new industries. Sefiora de Soto, while waiting for her husband, Hernan de Soto, in Florida, planted lemons, oranges, grapefruits and figs, and began the Florida citrus industry. Blessed Junipero Serra did the same in California. The Spanish settlers were miners (Onate had owned extensive silver mines in Mexico prior to coming to New Mexico) and began the mining industry in the West. When gold was discovered in California in 1849, it was the native Hispanos who showed the newcomers how to mine, assay and refine that gold. (In return, they were massacred and run off their lands.) The ranching and cattle industry in Texas, New Mexico and the west began for Americans when the new comers rounded up the cattle running wild there. The system of branding cattle and registering those brands, still in use today, had been established by the Spanish. Everything about the cowboy culture in the West, from their clothes, their horse trappings, nomenclature and even their yodeling and songs were derived from the *vaqueros* (buckaroos). Today we drive Pintos, Mustangs and even an occasional De Soto. By the way, Mickey Mouse too is Spanish. Walt Disney and his brothers were born in Spain. It is clear to see that, without the Spanish, life in America would be much less interesting and colorful. Certainly, the English and Americans could have done these things had the Spanish not done so, but they didn't...and we are the richer for it.

