

Where Did Hispanics Originate?

By

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This is Hispanic heritage month, a time when as Hispanics, we generally and with almost knee-jerk reaction pay varying degrees of homage to our cultural roots dating back to Spain and Portugal, (Hispania). As a civically involved person who actively promotes the positive contributions of Hispanics since my college days when we were promoting “La Huelga” (boycotting grapes and lettuce in the early 70’s), I’m scarcely aware of an Hispanic (not including historians) who actively harkens back historically further than that ceremonial salute to the father country around the time of Columbus’ discovery of America. A recent internet flap over the Spanish origins of cowboys and the ranching culture, however, has compelled me to consult archeological research and ancient Spanish archives to find our first origins.

A few short years after I posted my internet book on America’s First Cowboys in (<http://nmhcpl.org/COWBOY.html>) 1997 a group of Scotsmen surfaced to challenge my claim that the first cowboys were of Spanish and Portuguese heritage, asserting that prior to the founding of the country of Spain there existed Scottish cowboys and that it was rather their descendants who brought the culture of ranching and cowboy technology to America. That assertion is a half truth and half truths trouble me more than bold faced lies because they pass more often for the whole truth.

Stanley G. Payne writes in *A History of Spain and Portugal* that the “Hispanic peninsula lies at the extreme southwestern tip of Europe, in the direction of Africa and the outer Atlantic. It is partially separated from the rest of Europe by the Pyrenees.... It is second only to Switzerland as the highest area in Western Europe, the land like the original New Mexico which included most of the American Southwest, rising rapidly from the lowlands to high desert hill country.”

Here, I remove my cowboy hat and put on my Hispanic “Paul Harvey” hat and give you, “the rest of the story.” True enough, before there existed the governments we know today as Spain and Portugal there was a more generalized group of people from the Iberian Peninsula referred to as “**Iberians.**” *Hispania*, translated to English as *Spain* was the name given Iberian Spain and Portugal by the Romans to the peninsula at a time when the

label was **only** geographic without specific cultural or political connotation. These first Iberian Hispanic people were an agrarian-pastoral people in the broadest sense and as a result of geographic, climatic, and political forces, and (through natural selection), their own genetic hardiness, over the millennia maintained lives as crop farmers and shepherds, but refined, developed, specialized, and perfected as a people the culture and technology of animal farming, (ranching). Renown Spanish archivist and author of *El Ganado Primitivo Andaluz y Sus Implicaciones en el Descubrimiento de America*, E. Rodero, A. Rodero & J.V. Delgado, hereinafter referred to as Rodero sheds considerable light on Hispanic history. There is a lot to be said about the genetic propensities of DNA. An excerpt of Rodero tells us “the Romans described members of most of the Hispanic tribes as rather short, dark-haired, white-skinned, and physically agile, if not particularly muscular characteristics which would seem to describe modern as well as ancient inhabitants of the peninsula.”

The oldest historical discoveries, archeological artifacts, and rock art found in Spain date back to circa 30,000 to 50,000 B.C. Among the most important remains of this period are the caves Cova Negra (Játiva) and Piñar (Granada).

The largest single ethnic element was the **Iberian tribes** that were perhaps descendants of these first natives (of 50,000BC) or who more recently moved into the peninsula around 6000-4000 B.C. when the first representations of halters on domesticated horses appeared with the first equestrians. These were the people who first developed the cowboy and ranching culture we have come to know as the old and new “West.” These Iberians christened “Hispanics” by the Romans were as evidenced by the best archeological and archival research THE first “Hispanics,” and THE first “cowboys.”

But before these Iberians were discovered and renamed Hispanics by Rome they were discovered and named by the first clearly definable group of immigrants; enter a sizable wave of Celtic migrants around 1200-1300 BC from central or northern Europe. Scotsmen, Irishmen, and Welch to name a few, are all subgroups of the Celtic genre. The early Gaelic name of Spain, “Iberia”, is Celtic and is derived from their word “aber”, or “open” as it translates in Spanish, meaning “harbor” or mouth of the river.

There is little dispute among historians that at this point in history many cultures were agrarian or pastoral in nature as were the Celts. What makes the Iberians unique among pastoral and agrarian people around the globe are the level of technological specialty and the profound depth of resolve that this way, (ranching) of life had evolved over the millennia in Iberia. Rodero’s research

informs us that “the largest ethnic group in the peninsula, the Iberians, were strongly tribal and warlike, qualities characteristic of the population of ancient Hispania as a whole.” Around the globe most victims of repeat invasions eventually capitulated and accepted the ways of the invaders. In the alternative, the more Iberian ranchers were imposed and intruded upon the more they resisted and clung to their own ways. This ranching culture was further hardened, galvanized, and specialized over time as a function of the climate and geography combined with subsequent waves of invaders.

At this point in history in the northern sector of the central plateau and in the Duero valley in the interior of the northwestern area the Celts fused with the earlier Iberian population to form the so-called Celt-Iberian race. In any event as the critics of my book would assert, they (the Celts) took the cowboy technology they learned in Iberia with them. By the eighth and ninth centuries B.C. Celt Iberian communities and tribes had integrally fused their cultural, agrarian, and ranching technologies.

“Archaeological evidence of the advent of riding in Spain occurs in rock art dating before 2000 B.C. and in fragments of Celtic weapons, horseshoes, bridle bits, and prick spurs by 500 B.C. About the same time, bent-knee riders in saddles of concave silhouette appear in Iberian stone carvings, bronze castings, and vase paintings,” according to *Man Made Mobile, Early Saddles of Western North America*, Richard E. Ahlborn, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1980.

Stanley goes on to say that notwithstanding the peninsula having been subject to invasion and very light immigration throughout its history; the Roman conquest was not heavy enough to alter the genetic or phenotypical composition of the inhabitants significantly. “The complete lack of political or cultural unity among the disparate societies of the peninsula impeded rather than facilitated their conquest by Rome. The incorporation of Hispania into the empire was a long, slow process, lasting from 218 B.C. to 19 B.C. (though the major part was completed by 133 B.C.). This was a much longer time than was required to subjugate other major portions of the Mediterranean littoral;” – more evidence of the tenacity of the Iberian Hispanics. This extended period of isolation sustained and contributed to their ability to perfect and consistently maintain a predominance of animal farming and to develop salient methods and higher more specialized ranching technology. “The fact also that it was highlighted by celebrated examples of diehard resistance the most famous of which was the struggle to the death of the town of Numantia in 133 B.C. has led some Spanish historians to view the ancient Hispanic tribes as already “Spanish” in their cultural characteristics, particularly in their xenophobia and obstinate resistance to foreign domination.” Large numbers of Hispanic troops

volunteered to serve in the Roman forces and because of the hardy Iberian penchant for protecting the homelands and their warrior skills, the peninsula was the major source of mercenaries in the Mediterranean for nearly two thousand years. “In some respects, these qualities of ancient Hispania paralleled those of most of the rest of the ancient Mediterranean world, but in Hispania they were more pronounced and were less successfully challenged by alternate developments. Historically, this pervasiveness in the peninsula toward such ways of life has been more widespread and persistent than elsewhere in Mediterranean and Western Europe. At its height Roman Hispania may have had a population of five million or more. This was concentrated particularly in the more urban south and east but was also fairly dense in the south-central region, in Lusitania, and in parts of the northwest. Yet the Romanization of the peninsula was far from complete. Much of the north and northwest was influenced little by Roman life. Resistance was always strongest among the more primitive, warlike tribes of the Cantabrian mountain range in the far north. A somewhat tenuous military dominion was maintained, but even at the height of the empire there were only a few Roman towns in the far north. The Basques offered less direct military resistance but remained even more impervious to cultural assimilation. Still, Spaniards absorbed a considerable degree of the Roman culture as is still today evident in their language.

In 409, when the Roman Empire started to fall, Gothic tribes invaded the peninsula and established their kingdom in 419.

In the early 5th century, Germanic tribes, invaded the peninsula, namely the Suevi, the Vandals (Silingi and Hasdingi) and their allies, the Sarmatian Alans. Only the kingdom of the Suevi (Quadi and Marcomanni) would endure after the arrival of another wave of Germanic invaders, the Visigoths, who conquered all of the Iberian Peninsula and expelled or partially integrated the Vandals and the Alans. The Visigoths eventually conquered the Suevi kingdom and its capital city Bracara between 584–585. Though before their entry into the peninsula the Visigoths were culturally more romanized than any other Germanic group, they were an essentially pastoral people....

The Gothic control lasted until 711, when Muslim armies crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and defeated the last Visigoth king. Islamic Moors, North African Muslims (mainly Berber with some Arab) invaded the Iberian Peninsula, destroying the Visigothic Kingdom.. Many of the displaced Gothic nobles took refuge with native Hispanics in the unconquered north Asturian highlands. Thus commenced the time when they and their Hispanic neighbors joined in the war of reconquest, known as La Reconquista.

In 868, Count Vímara Peres reconquered and governed the region between the Minho and Douro rivers. That county was then known as *Portucale*, later translated to Portugal.

According to Stanley the southern parts of Spain, called *al-Andalus*, were prospering in the Moorish epoch, thanks to new sciences and agricultural techniques. The Moors conquered major parts of the country until they were defeated for the first time by Visigoth king Pelayo at *Covadonga* in northern Spain, 722.

Though the small Christian kingdoms in the north were a nucleus of resistance, the Arabian culture was prospering in the rest of the country. The Muslim Spain by that time got politically independent of the Arabian empire, and in the 10th century *Abderraman III*. Made Al-Andalus his own caliphate. In this epoch Cordoba was the indisputable cultural center of this area of the world. Decadence started in the 11th century, when the various Arabian noble families were more and more at variance among themselves, and al-Andalus broke into numerous small caliphates. The Christian kingdoms in the north continued the reconquest of Spain.

The marriage between *Isabel of Castilia*, (*Castile*), and *Ferdinand of Aragon* in 1469, formally united the two kingdoms in 1474 making Spain the most dynamic monarchy in Europe and becoming the turning point of the *Reconquista*. From then on Muslims rapidly lost territory, until they were completely expelled with the loss of their last remaining caliphate, Granada, in 1492.

Isabel and Ferdinand succeeded in uniting the whole country under their crown, and their effort to "re-Christianize" Spain resulted in the *Spanish Inquisition*, when thousands of Jews and Moors who refused to convert to Christianity were expelled or killed.

Like Spain, Portugal ascended to a great world power in the Age of Discoveries with a vast Empire. Following its heyday as a world power during the 15th and 16th centuries, Portugal lost much of its wealth and status with the destruction of Lisbon in a 1755 earthquake, occupation during the Napoleonic Wars, and the independence in 1822 of Brazil.

After the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus in 1492 tons of gold and silver were brought in from the new continent and Spain became one of the most powerful nations of this epoch called the *Golden Age*." It was with the Golden Age that the Spanish and Portuguese introduced its people, Hispanics

along with the cowboy era to the Americas and USA via Mexico and New Mexico.

This is the point in history to which I originally pointed us Hispanics; relating to, Spain, the Father country.

Hopefully going back behind the Spanish 1500's by fifty thousand years will help broaden our perspective on the deep roots which anchor us profoundly to western Europe, a land like the American Southwest where even before we were speaking the romance languages of Rome and Spain we were developing a flair for the noble specialty of animal husbandry and gentile equestrian style. At the same time prolonged harsh times and circumstances took no prisoners. Adaptive skills forced us to prevail and succeed into countless new generations bringing us into the twenty first century with still new social and cultural challenges.

Given our history, tenacity, and perseverance I have no doubts that we will have more proud heritage to pay homage to during national Hispanic heritage month in the next fifty thousand years.