

The Black Legend Lives

By Ray John de Aragon



**"Believe nothing of what you read, nothing of
what you hear, and only half of what you see."**

Abraham Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln could have easily been referring to La Leyenda Negra and its associated social injustices when he made his profound statement. As one of our greatest heroes for human rights, good "Ole Abe" battled against prejudice and discrimination in all forms. Padre Antonio Jose Martinez, our own New Mexico 19th century civil rights leader, also fought strenuously for human dignity.

During this cuarto centenario year in New Mexico, which was meant to widely honor 400 years of Spanish contributions and achievements to this great state, we have seen vestiges of the Spanish Black Legend appear in unabated full force. La Leyenda Negra, the Black Legend, historically is the denigrating, ridiculing and wholesale chastising of Spanish traditions, heritage, culture, and history. This unjust discrimination runs the spectrum from subtle discrimination to vicious attacks against anything Spanish in origin. This year we have seen the hellish Black Legend rise in all its ugliness and hate.

First off, this year, Oñate and his colonists were called terrorists by certain people who used and are still using panel discussions, radio and TV talk shows, and the printed media to attack New Mexico Hispanic history. Under the guise of reconciliation with the American Indians others have found an avenue to propagate and perpetuate erroneous myths about our Spanish history and culture. Quite ironically, all of this cultural trampling has been done under the banner of brotherly love and anyone espousing a love and appreciation for their Spanish roots is treated with malice and disdain. Those who are unwittingly promoting Black Legend myths are doing so by stretching half-truths, or by using imaginary stories with little, or no foundation of fact. This is unfortunately being done at the expense of our Spanish cultural dignity.

It has often been popularly said that New Mexico's Spanish language is "archaic" and that if it were not for the peoples use of half Spanish and half English to compensate for a limited vocabulary, the language would have died out. The creation of this Spanglish is described as so humorous, that our language has

been the butt of many written and spoken jokes. It is also said that the language has been "purified" by the "modern" Spanish being brought in by immigrants from other countries.

These misconceptions continue with, "New Mexico is the fabled land of Aztlan. The former home of the Aztec Indians who traveled South to found their empire at Tenochtitlan. The genizaro Hispanics found here are descendants of half-Indian and half-Spanish mestizos and are members of a brown race with no true cultural identity of their own. The Spanish brought no women with them other than Indian female servants and black female slaves. These primitive people idolized statues, participated in nocturnal pagan rites and their curanderas practiced witchcraft and cast spells. The Spanish male colonists were in actuality outcast Jews from Spain that came to New Mexico to avoid religious persecution, and the Spanish friars that came with them raped the Indian women." This is only a small example of the Black Legend myths that have found and gained new life and vitality during this cuarto Centenario year.

Anyone reading and studying the history of Mexico would know that Aztlan is Nahuatl for el lugar de las garzas, the land of the herons. the original name Aztatlan is still in use today in Mexico and is the area at the northern tip of the Mexican state of Nayarit. It is common knowledge among Mexican students that the Aztecs came from there and then ventured south to establish their empire. The location of Aztlan is well documented and it is situated in **Mexico, NOT New Mexico.**

New Mexico Hispanic natives should not feel ashamed of their Spanish language. On the contrary, we should be extremely proud that we are adept at two languages, English and Spanish. New Mexico Hispanics are so linguistically talented that they can move quite easily and quite comfortably from one language to another but not only that, our people have also been linguistic innovators and many words they have developed or used have slipped into the Spanish and English languages. Detractors, unfortunately, lead us to believe otherwise.

Contrary to the "Academic" Black Legend fable, Spanish women along with their families and husbands, came as pioneer settlers with Oñate in 1598. These determined heroic women not only preserved the colony, but through their sacrifices and undaunting spirit they preserved Spanish customs, traditions, culture, heritage, and history for succeeding generations through their descendants. These courageous women passed down the only culture they knew which was Spanish. If they had been Indian, Black, or members of another race, they would have passed down that culture in their families. As to the mixture fallacy, all world cultures have borrowed from each other through the centuries, but this does not change their own culture, or alter who they are. It does not also create a new race of people; otherwise we would have a million races in the world. Hispanics are members of the White Caucasian race.

Perhaps all world people should pull away from classifications and just call themselves Earthlings.

The term genizaro in colonial New Mexico was used to describe the displaced Pueblos and other Indians who were made homeless by marauding Indians. The Spanish government established new genizaro Indian settlements, but later on these were also attacked and destroyed by the marauding tribes. Genizaro in New Mexico quite literally meant, "Man without a country." At one point it came to be used as a derogatory term as was Chicano, which is simply an Indian pronunciation of the word Mejjicano or Mechicano. Mechicano is, of course, synonymous with Mexicano and is used interchangeably as such in some parts of Mexico. The Spanish in New Mexico have always thoroughly enjoyed chicharrones (fried pork fat or skins) and a multitude of dishes made with pork which is considered an "unclean meat" by the Jews. No true Jew eats pork in any dish, including carne adovada, chile colorado, chile verde, chicharrones, nor foods such as morcias (blood pudding), burrunates (deep-fried fat wrapped with intestines), etc. Curanderas in New Mexico are highly regarded herbal healers, not witchcraft practitioners like the Curandero men of Mexico which is totally a different thing. We also do not idolize wooden statues, but we do have a very deep-rooted love for our santos and retablos and the Christian saints they represent. The extremely dedicated and very religious Spanish friars, of whom nearly forty thousand were martyred by the Indians through the centuries in the Americas, were not rapists of Indian women, nor were the Spanish settlers wholesale rapists of Indian women and Indian cultures. The Spanish male colonists had their own Spanish women and their own Spanish culture.

It is extremely difficult to dispel Black Legend myths, but during the closing days of this Cuarto Centenario year it is hoped that Hispanics in New Mexico are finally given the credit they deserve for their glorious contributions. New Mexico Hispanos have a distinct Spanish culture, which is second to none. It is one, which is complete with its own Spanish dialect, regionalisms and colloquial expressions. We have our very own history, which is not Puerto Rican, Cuban, or Mexican. We have our own heroes, our own traditions, and own heritage. We certainly do not have to borrow from or claim someone else's. The few that seek to deny their roots out of shame fostered by Black Legend prejudice should not continue being victimized by this social injustice. A pride for who we are, and what we are, is the best lesson that can be learned during this Cuarto Centenario year by everyone. There should be absolutely no space given those that promote and foster bigotry, hatred, and prejudice against Spanish history and culture or any culture and people.