

INTERNATIONAL THIRD WORLD STUDIES

JOURNAL & REVIEW

VOLUME 13

2002

-
- **Burundi's Regroupment Camps: Environmental Decline and the Role of Collective Discontent**
Aaron Hale 1

 - **Respectability Restored in Abioseh Nicol's "The Truly Married Woman," Echoed in Alice Walker's "Roselily"**
Owen G. Mordaunt 11

 - **The Silence of Women, The Voices of Women**
John R. Warner, Jr. 15

 - **Book Review: *The Quest for Legitimacy and the Withering Away of Utopia***
Rory J. Conces 23

 - **Book Review: *The Legacy of Vicente Guerrero, Mexico's First Black Indian President***
Owen G. Mordaunt 27

 - **Book Review: *Cuba, the Elusive Nation. Interpretations of National Identity***
Maria Arbeláez 29

 - **Book Review: *From Zaire to the Democratic Republic of Congo and The Congo from Leopold to Kabila: A People's History***
Paul Allen Williams 33

 - **Book Note: *Charting Caribbean Development***
Matthew Marx 37
-

Book Review: The Legacy of Vicente Guerrero, Mexico's First Black Indian President

Owen G. Mordaunt

Department of English, University of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha, NE 68182-0175

Vincent, Theodore G. *The Legacy of Vicente Guerrero, Mexico's First Black Indian President*. Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 2001. 337 pp. \$55.00 (cloth).

According to the author, Theodore G. Vincent, *The Legacy of Vicente Guerrero, Mexico's First Black Indian President* is "a study of Mexican cultural nationalism as traced through the family of mule driver Vicente Guerrero" (xi). Vicente Guerrero was the second president of Mexico and the first to come from *las clases populares* (the "popular" classes), a euphemistic reference to an individual of peasant or working class background. Guerrero was of obscure origins and of Indian and African ancestry, therefore of racially mixed roots. This circumstance of birth is important because it would have a bearing on both Guerrero's life and death.

While centering on Guerrero (and his family), the book has interwoven into it details that paint a picture of the racial, social, and political climate of the time. This information is necessary in order to put into perspective Guerrero's role and passion for the struggle for equality from the colonial power, Spain.

Throughout the text it is clear that to Guerrero, discrimination based on race and skin color was an anathema. The fight for human rights and racial equality was therefore his mission:

In 1810 the twenty-seven-year-old Vicente Guerrero joined the independence struggle to promote his vision of a grand unity for both of his struggling people, the 10 percent of the nation labeled African Indigenous and the 60 percent labeled American Indigenous. Guerrero initially rose in rank because he spoke many indigenous languages. He later showed that he could deliver compelling arguments for democratic unity in Spanish as well as in Indigenous languages. He also proved to be master military strategist. By the war's last years he was the Mexican commander in chief. (8)

It seems the author provides demographic information on different races both for comparative purposes and also to demonstrate the gravity of the situation and to show how all this impinged on the lives of the downtrodden. Throughout the book, reference is made to the negative attitudes the

whites had toward Afro-Mexicans, who along with the Indians were considered inferior. No wonder attempts were made by some light skinned people to pass for white. The branding of non-whites was so detestable that some of the clergy gave wrong racial information so that many people could legally be classified as Spaniard.

When Guerrero became president, his aim was to create a democratic independent country with equality and justice for all its citizens. Guerrero did not become president without a struggle as an independence leader. However, the tough decrees that he issued while president, including heavy taxation of the rich, contributed to conservative attacks, resulting in Congress stripping him of his power within a year, on 1 January 1830. The vice-president, Bustamante, assumed the presidency. A year later, Guerrero was captured through a ruse and shortly thereafter was executed.

Included in the book are accounts of the roles played by other independence leaders. When Father Hidalgo began the war of independence, Guerrero was a gunsmith in his home town. Guerrero joined the rebellion in November 1810. The second leader, Morelos, who was also a cleric, elevated Guerrero to the rank of army captain. Following Morelos' capture and execution, Guerrero assumed leadership.

The author makes reference to the fact that Guerrero's supporters and followers were heavily Afro-Mexican and often identified themselves as "Indios." The author states that the Black Indian contribution in the fight for independence is overlooked, perhaps due to the fact that the racial composition changed. A unity pact brought many Creoles, who were fairly well-to-do. These Creoles had been involved in the killing of freedom fighters. It is unfortunate that after independence the elite continued to show racial stereotyping toward Afro-Mestizos even though Guerrero had made an effort to keep race out of the political agenda.

In his acknowledgments, Vincent credits the book to the work and assistance of several professors and others, but more striking are the sources he makes reference to first:

This story is indebted to researchers of colonial social life as well as to political historians of a later period. A boom in the social sciences begun in 1982 by the history-loving Mexican president Miguel de la Madrid has been invaluable. One feature of this interest has been work by local elders and other informal scholars. Nationwide, they have produced

country and town histories that have given life to darker, poorer, neglected Mexico—as did octogenarian Luis Hernández Llach, who illuminated the Indigenous, African, Filipino, and Malaysian roots of his town, San Jerónimo, located in the state of Guerrero. Also in Guerrero, Benito Salina and his team had produced the cultural and historical *Así Somos* bi-monthly, of which there are billboard editions pasted on library and coffeehouse walls.
(xi)

The book is written in readable and straightforward language, but it moves back and forth in historical detail. It is nevertheless very informative and could be used as an excellent resource by those interested in the Mexican struggle for independence. For those concerned with the pervasiveness of racism, in this case a Spanish colonial setting, this is the book to read.