

A POSSIBLE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR LA LLORNA LEGEND

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The widespread legend of La Llorna seems to have a possible historical basis dating back to Mexico City area in 1550. A lovely young Indian girl, reportedly once of Aztec royalty, but now non-distinguished from peasant women under Spanish rule, sought out and received the affections of the local Spanish leader, one Don Nuno de Montesclaros. They became lovers. He promised her nothing; she hoped for marriage, and eventually she became the mother of two children. As often happens, once the interest in her face and figure became commonplace he ceased to pay any attention to her, and she was forced to return to her humble home.

Still desperately in love with her faithless lover, and without funds to support herself and her two children, she decided to confront the Don in his mansion and demand marriage, and if this failed, at least support for herself and her children. Upon reaching the estate of Don Montesclaros she was suprised to hear gay laughter and music. She hesitated to enter during a party of the Don's, especially since she was to make demands, although she thought them proper and just. She asked at the door what was the occasion for the party and was told it was the Don's wedding night. In despair she confronted the Don and sought redress for her plight. He calmly informed her that

marriage was never an option. Although she was an Indian princess, her current station in life made any such arrangement impossible. She then requested that he help support his two illegitimate children she bore as his lover, and again the Don laughed, and ordered her forcibly escorted from the property.

There seems little question that the rude and unfeeling treatment brought on anger and insanity in the air. Her cries rang through the streets as the poor girl, sobbing in frustration and humiliation, ran to her house, her face stained with tears and her hair in disarray. Her mind was bitter and confused. Like many a distraught woman who has been abandoned by her lover, she thought only of revenge, and in doing so transferred the hatred of the father to the children. Picking up a knife, she murdered her defenseless youngsters, the offspring of the nobleman. This was a foolish act, since apparently the nobleman had no emotional ties to either the mother or the children. Surely the youngsters were positively innocent of the events that brought them into this world. The children's bodies were carelessly thrown into Lake Tezcoco in a feeble attempt to hide the deed. This was unnecessary, since the next day the bloody madwoman, still wearing the clothes that spoke of the terrible unnatural deed she had committed, confessed her terrible secret to the authorities. The Don, seeing the opportunity to rid himself forever of this irritant, had her quickly brought to justice; convicted and hung. The Don even witnessed the event and requested that her body hang from the

gibbet for some hours as an example to others. Even in death he rejected her, allowing her body to be buried in a paupers grave. He apparently had little compassion for his ex-mistress. It is reported he slept very well the night after the execution in the arms of his new wife. There is no record to show that his new spouse had any knowledge of her husbands connection with the executed madwoman. However, the Don's days of peace and tranquility were nearing an end. The wails of a ghost were nightly heard outside his mansion, and throughout the region. Along streams and shores of Lake Tezcoco, a woman in white cried constantly for her lost children, murdered and lying beneath the waters. It was believed that her deeds, although she was insane, barred her from Heaven, and made her an earthbound spirit. She was forever to remain a ghost, seeking the bodies of her children she had killed, in hopes of their resurrection or at least a proper burial. This is just one possible source of the spirit of La Llorona, "the weeping woman," whose presence is strongly believed by the Hispanic population from the American Southwest to the southern tip of South America. In our Southwest, hardly any household, and surely no village, is without its personal encounter with La Llorona, dressed either in white or black, crying along waterways, seeking her lost children. Folklorists claim an Aztec "water spirit" is the basis for these legends, while many claim that Dona Marina, the famous "Malenche," the mistress linguist of Cortez, forms the

basis of the folktale. Malenche's linguistic knowledge gave Cortez the ability to converse with subject Indian tribes and have them join him in his campaign against the Aztecs, something he needed, if he was to succeed in his conquest of Mexico. The Indians claim she is the weeping woman and she cries not for her biological children, but for the Aztec nation she betrayed by allying herself with the Spanish against the Indians. However, the only source that gives actual dates and location is the story of Don Nuno de Montesclaros and his forsaken mistress. The ghost of Dona Luisa, however, must have reached his ears. All along Lake Tezcoco, and even beyond, wherever water was known, the ghost of the hanged woman cried out for her children whom she murdered. Her deeds must have made her earthbound and her own repentance for her deeds was to seek the bodies of her children and give them proper burial. This is just one origin account of La Llorona, for there are others, perhaps not as well documented, but certainly as entrenched in folklore as the one presented in this paper.

REFERENCES

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