

# Mexican Indians Are a Problem



Young Aztecs.

(Copyrighted, 1913, by Frank G. Carpenter.)  
**MEXICO CITY**—The red man is a more serious problem in Mexico than the black man is in the United States. This country has over 15,000,000 people, and of these less than 5,000,000 are whites. There are about 4,000,000 pure Indians and 5,000,000 more who are red men, more or less crossed with the whites.

The pure Indians are practically uneducated, and this is largely so of the mixed breeds. The greater part of them were for years in little more than debt slavery, and today some millions of them are mere hewers of wood and drawers of water on the ranches of the rich hacendados. Some work in the towns and others live in villages, maintaining many of the customs of centuries ago.

Within the last few years Mr. Frederick Starr has been making studies of the Mexican Indians. He has traveled from here across the country down to Guatemala City, visiting the various tribes and taking measurements of their hands, busts and of other parts of their figures. He has photographed thousands of them and has made plaster casts of many. A part of his travels was through the mountains of southern Mexico, where he found many Indian villages, each village being a little republic. He found many new tribes and also many descendants of the ancient peoples who inhabited Mexico during the days of Montezuma. It is through his researches and those of other ethnologists that the authorities here are studying the great political problems which confront them.

**Fifty-One Different Languages.**  
They now know that there are scores of different Indian tribes in Mexico and that each has its peculiarities. In 1864 one of the chief scientists of the republic, Don Manuel Orozco y Barra, found that there were fifty-one different Indian languages, and, in addition, about sixty-nine dialects. He divided these languages into eleven different families and it was later shown that nearly all of these Indians had used ideographs and employed them in communicating thought.

One of the best known of the Indian races is the Aztec. It was the ruling race at the time Cortez came and there are millions of it on the plateau today. The Aztec civilization has been so pictured by Prescott that many think that it is about the only race of Indians in Mexico. The truth is that the Aztecs got the most of their civilization from the Toltecs, whom they conquered when they came here from the north. They got their religion from them, and also their calendar and architecture. The Toltecs built the pyramids of Mexico, and either they or a branch of this race, known as the Mayans, constructed the wonderful cities of Yucatan and those of Guatemala as well. I have already written of the ruins of Quirigua in the Motagua valley, not far from the Caribbean sea in Guatemala, which our archeologists are now excavating. They are the remains of temples built by the Mayans, who are supposed to have gone there from Mexico centuries ago.

The Aztecs called themselves Mexicans and it is from them that we get the name Mexico. Their descendants are numerous today, but are largely peons who work for the whites. It is from them that the rank and file of the soldiers are recruited.

**Ruins of Mitla.**  
The most famous ruins of this tribe lie within twenty-five miles to the southeast of Oaxaca City; they are about 30 miles south of the Mexican capital, and one can go there by train in less than a day. There are fairly good hotels at Oaxaca, and from there one can reach the ruins by carriage in five or six hours, or, he can go by train to San Pablo in an hour and a half and stop at the hotel there. In the latter case he will be right at the ruins and can easily spend a day or so in moving about through them.

The ruins are those of the ancient city of Mitla; they are of great extent, and the Indians say that under them lie the chambers wherein are stored the treasures of the ancient Zapotec kings. Some of the ruins are striking. The Hall of the Moonlight, for instance, has walls five feet thick and columns of enormous solid blocks of stone eighteen feet long, four feet high and five feet thick, and the pillars are porphyry, rising fourteen



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Two Indians from Vera Cruz.

feet from the floor and extending, it is said, six feet below it; they are as big around as a whisky barrel.

Next to this is the Salon of the Moonlight, which is 100 feet long and 29 feet wide; its walls are ten feet in height and it has a floor of cement. The decorations of Mitla make you think of Pompeii. Some of the floors are in mosaics, and many of the structures are wonderfully carved, reminding one of the crumbling temples and fort at Delhi, in India.

**Strange Indians of Northern Mexico.**  
Some of the most interesting of the Mexican tribes live in the northern part of the country. Chihuahua, for instance, the Casas Grandés, which lie near the railroad on the way from Juarez to Terrasas. These Casas correspond somewhat to the homes of our cave dwellers, save that they are built on the level and were of vast extent. They were, in short, the first apartment houses on record. The chief building is 300 feet long from north to south, and 200 feet wide from west to east, covering an area of almost five acres. It seems to have consisted of three separate piles, united to lower buildings. The apartments varied in size, and the walls in places were forty or fifty feet high, indicating that the building had six or seven stories. These buildings were in ruins at the time of the Spanish conquest, and very little is known of the people who built them, although some suppose them to date back to the Moquis.

**Some Cave Dwellers of Mexico.**  
In Chihuahua we have the Tarahumara Indians, some of which still live in caves, and who are sometimes known as the American cave dwellers. Similar homes are to be found in the Sierra Madre mountains, the entrances being protected against the weather and wild beasts by stone or mud walls. Some of the caves are very large, and are reached by ladders, or by stairways cut out inside the house. Others of the houses are of stone, and some are of adobe, with roofs of thatch.

The Tarahumara, both women and men, are noted for their long, flowing, jet-black hair. The men pull out all the hairs from their faces. They say that whiskers are a sign of wickedness, and they believe that the devil has always a beard. These people are said to be the greatest runners on record, and instances are known of where men have run 179 miles without stopping. They go on a slow trot, and keep it up for hours. The women can run as fast and as well as the men, and both men and women have moonlight races and other athletic sports. They sometimes race by torchlight.

The Pima Indians, who are found in the same locality, are much like the Tarahumara and the Tepicenses. Another tribe nearby let their finger and toe nails grow in Chinese fashion. They say that cutting off the nails will produce blindness, and that if a girl sucks the backbone of a deer her back will grow curved and she will have the backache. These tribes are noted for their chastity, those who fall from grace being publicly switched.

live the Huicholes, whom the Mexicans call barbarians. They have little to do with the present troubles, and do not want anything but to be let alone. They have their homes in the fastnesses of the mountains and are so warlike that it was 100 years before the Spaniards were able to conquer them. They are nominally converted to Christianity, but they are practically barbarians and are said to be Christians only when favors are to be obtained. Many of them are hunters, and they snare deer in nets stretched between poles.

Some of the Huicholes look much like the Chinese, and this reminds me that I have seen many Japanese and Chinese faces among the Mexican Indians. It may be that a part of the ancient population drifted over from Asia across Bering strait, and came down here through our country. The Huicholes have a wicker chair now in use, and they employ it in their religious ceremonies. It may be that the custom of wearing long nails which I have mentioned came also from China.

The Huicholes are about five and one-half feet high, and their women are very good looking. They wear short skirts and tunics of cotton cloth which they weave upon their own looms. The legs are left bare and the skirt is caught in at the waist by a girdle. The girdle, like the obi of Japan, is more costly than any other part of the dress. The women wear necklaces and they have beads in their ears.

The Huichole houses each contain but one room and the entrance is low and small like that of the Eskimo igloo. The houses are circular and they are made of stone with thatched roofs. The idols are kept in caves in the hills.

**Mixtecos and Zapotecas.**  
Among the other Indians who have to be reckoned with in the Mexico to come, are the Zapotecas and the Mixtecos. Both of these races are noted for their intelligence, and they have already given Mexico some of its ablest men. Benito Juarez, for years the president of the republic, was a full-blooded Zapotec, and President Porfirio Diaz had Mixteca blood in his veins. These tribes are now found in the southern slopes of the central plateau. You may see them in Pueblo, Oaxaca, Guerrero and Moroles.

It is said that their ancestors date back to the time when Mitla, Xochicalco and Zaachila were built. The Zapotecas were never subdued by the Aztecs, and they are now growing in independence right along. There are a great many of them in Oaxaca, a state whose population is fully nine-tenths Indian. Some are to be found on the isthmus of Tehuantepec, where the women are noted for their picturesqueness and for their independent ways.

**Girls of Tehuantepec.**  
Indeed, the girls of Tehuantepec are among the beauties of the North American continent. They are as straight as a royal palm tree and their forms are beautifully rounded. They have olive skins, black hair and eyes and teeth as white as lime freshly slacked. Their ordinary costume is a jacket and skirt, the former having short sleeves and cut very low at the neck, so that it exposes their beautiful shoulders and arms. The jacket reaches almost to the waist and

a strip of bare skin usually shows between it and the skirt.

The skirt makes one think of that of the Burmese; it consists of a strip of red cloth several yards long; this is wrapped tightly around the hips and tucked in at the waist. In addition to this, every woman has a huipil for Sundays and feast days. The huipil is a lace decoration of enormous size, which is worn as a sort of head-dress; it incloses the face, or it may extend around the neck or hang down from the head at the back like the war plumes of a Comanche chief. On dress occasions the girls wear also full skirts, which are often heavily embroidered with lace.

These women do much of the work; they are thrifty and accumulative; they are fond of gold jewelry and like especially ornaments made of American twenty-dollar gold pieces. Girls may be frequently seen thus wearing a small fortune in gold double eagles, although their feet may be bare.

These people make beautiful blankets and they do fine embroidery. They have many queer customs. Marriages are made by the parents. The babies do not creep, but they crawl about on all fours like a monkey until they are able to stand.

Not far from the Huicholes live the Coras, of whom only about 2,500 remain. These Indians claim to have come from the east and they look not unlike Koreans. They have features much like the Anglo-Saxons and they consider themselves better than the other tribes about.

The Coras marry at fifteen and the women keep their beauty a long time, although their lives are very unsanitary. Their houses have no ventilation and they bury their dead in caves.

Frederick Starr estimates that there are still a quarter of a million of pure Tarascan Indians in Mexico. Many of these people are found about Lake Patzcuara in the state of Michoacan, where was once situated Tauntinnoan, a great Tarascan city. The name sounds like Chinese. This town was visited by the Spaniards in 1522, and they wrote of its civilization and arts. They told of the wonderful feather work, for which the people are noted today; of their mother-of-pearl and bone carvings and of their skill in enameling.

Here we again see a similarity between

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the Mexican Indian and the Chinese. In southern China is produced a kind of bird wing enamel in which the wings of the bluejay and humming bird are employed. The Tarascan do much the same work, getting their materials from the humming birds of Mexico, of which there are fifty different kinds, having feathers of every shape and color, running from sea green to emerald and from straw color to a fiery red.

The Tarascan have a tradition which corresponds to our deluge. Their Noah was called Tepl, and when the floods came he made a great boat and filled it with animals and birds. As the waters subsided he sent forth a vulture, but it remained away, feeding on the dead bodies which then covered the highlands.

Finally a humming bird was sent forth, and it came back with a leaf in its mouth.

The Tarascan believe in the evil eye, and they carry charms to ward off its effects. They do not like to be photographed, and would rather have strangers say evil things about their children than good things. The same is true of some of the people of Palestine.

I hear strange stories about the marriage customs of these Indians. They are said to believe in love charms, and think the dried little finger of a dead man will surely bring luck. It takes the place of the rabbit foot of the south. Near Lake Patzcuaro the chief place of courtship, is at the spring, and the lover watches for his sweetheart to go there to bring water. When he sees her he

catches hold of her rebosa or shawl, and refuses to let go until she says yes. If she does so, he smashes the jar of water which she has on her head, so that it falls over her, and her girl friends thereupon give her a new jar with which she can carry the water home. The next day the man takes a load of wood to the door of his sweetheart's home, and if this is accepted the match is complete. She then comes to his house, and he gives her a bouquet of yellow flowers, which color is supposed to bring luck.

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The eyes of the oil world have already begun to turn toward Southwest Oklahoma — particularly to Stephens County, near the town of Loco. Wise men who have followed the oil game in Oklahoma from its very start—geologists who solve nature's mysteries through science—newspapers which print authentic opinions—all are talking, discussing and looking expectantly to this field. Another tremendous sensation is likely to soon be loosed and that very soon. Indications and comparatively meager development point to the greatest of all Oklahoma Oil and Gas discoveries in this new field. The following is an editorial from The Daily Oklahoman, Tuesday, June 17, 1913:

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The Stephens county oil fields around Comanche have not attracted unusual attention until within a few months. But the development of the oil fields around Comanche is likely to be the surprise of that marvelous mineral growth which Oklahoma has shown since oil and gas have been found in such enormous quantities.

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