

# Black culture influenced music, rituals of Mexico, Brewer says

by Jane Owens

"Black culture is deeply embedded in Mexico's folklore," according to J. Mason Brewer, professor from East Texas State University and folklore specialist.

Addressing an audience of about 200 Tuesday night at the opening of UNL's Latin American Spring Festival, Brewer said the Negro has influenced Mexico's folktales, music and poetry. At least three blacks are Mexican folk heroes, he said.

Estabanico, a black slave brought to Mexico in 1527, is said to have discovered New Mexico and Arizona during a search for the Seven Cities of Cibola.

Another black Mexican, Vicente Guerrero, was the second president of the Mexican Republic. As president, he started a national school system, granted religious freedom, established a coinage system and abolished slavery and the death penalty, Brewer said.

A third black Mexican is known as "the national folk hero of the Mexican people," he said. "El Negrito Poeta" (The Little Black Poet) is the embodiment of Mexican common sense and wisdom. Known for his witty rhymes, the poet can be compared to America's Poor

Richard, Brewer said.

"One of the greatest contributions the black man has made to Mexican culture is music," he said. The black influence also is found today in Mexico's religious and ritualistic dances, he said.

Black poetry also plays an important part of Mexican culture, Brewer said. The poetry expresses many different moods, including bitterness and love, he said.

"In his poetry, the Negro has assimilated what little society has given him with his love of nature and his own soul," Brewer said.

The first black Mexicans were slaves brought by Cortez in 1519—100 years before black slaves were brought to the U.S.

By the mid-16th century, 20,000 blacks were living in Mexico, Brewer said.

"Spanish and Negro blood became so mixed that it was rare to find a typical Negro by the middle of the 16th century," he said. "This mixing gave rise to many castes and classes."

Less than one per cent of Mexico's population is black, he said. "Those blacks continue to live like their ancestors in sparsely populated rural areas. They have no desire to migrate to large urban centers."



J. Mason Brewer . . . "Black culture is deeply embedded in Mexico's folklore."

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