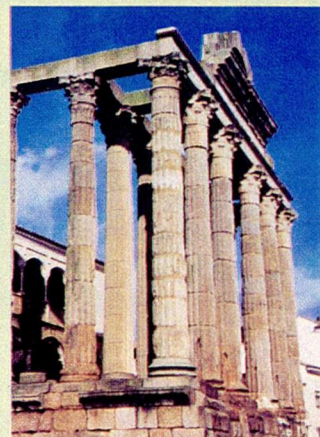


OUR ANCIENT ROMAN LEGACY

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY DENISE M. LUGO

As *Latinos* sculpt the new American 21st century, it is important to sit back, rethink and personally acknowledge the ancestral cultural legacy that runs through our veins. *Latinos*, as a genetic and cultural group, continue to redefine America's new face by chiseling her future. While our *Latino* fingers expressively and lovingly help to create this ongoing global phenomena, we must not forget the genetic cultural foundations that serve as our guiding spirits, often silent, yet always there beneath our often overtly American packaging. With the stars and stripes rippling down our face, we look down at our hands, which are the symbolic existence conceived by the endless generations of our shared cultural heritage. As with terra cotta clay, we continue to craft our daily existence; with every breath we stir the spiritual essence of our future generations.



A collage taking you through a journey from Rome, Portugal and Mexico.



As a *Chicana* "Latin-Americanist," specializing in Pre-Columbian Art, with extensive Latin-American, American and European travel research and years of teaching experience at the college and university level in Southern California, I came to realize that many of my *Latino* students had an on-going struggle finding and coming to grips with their *Latino* cultural and social make-up. As *Latinos*, often labeled the "New Americans" of the 21st century, we continue to make our contribution into the diverse, collective Statue of Liberty, in the name of our old world culture—Spanish, Portuguese, Moorish (Arabs and Berbers conquered and ruled Spain for 800 years), and our new world-indigenous native roots from Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America.

As the new media of communications "globalizes" our local communities, it also flirts with the possibility of cultural extension. As we witness the cultural homogenizing fusion of Western European nations into a singular civilization power base, the world becomes even smaller. Globally, *Latinos* have always symbolized the union of two civilizations/worlds, standing with one leg in the Old World and the other in the new world-Americas.

Yet, as *Latinos* we cannot lead the future of the United States until we acknowledge our Roman, Moorish and Aztec heritage. To date, the prevailing and more accepted *Latino* and *Chicano* cultural legacy only takes into account our Pre-Columbian past. This revisionist history, as prescribed in the 1960s, places the majority of historical emphasis on the Pre-Columbian civilizations. As a result, *Latinos* in the United States then turned their backs on their European, Spanish and Portuguese cultural roots. With the passage of time, the historical importance of the native American cultural roots created a cultural backlash towards the Spanish and Portuguese old world parentage, which was and continues to be supported by artists, writers and *Chicano* scholars. The mood of the *Chicano* Civil Rights political leaders of that time chastised *Latinos* in the United States for trying to promote their European ancestry while ignoring their ancient native roots.

Through this cultural reaffirmation of their indigenous roots, *Latinos* reversed the historical racial bias against their "Indian" ancestry—a bias usually credited to Spain and Portugal, who in the 16th century conquered all of what is now Latin America. Historically, Latin America continues to reflect what Mexicans refer to as the "*mestizaje*," a mixture of Spanish, Moorish and the indigenous Mexicans who occupied the land before the Spanish. Although some countries like Chile and Argentina are known to have stronger European roots and smaller native populations remaining.

The everyday reality is that as we redefine and chisel America's new face, we culturally balance and compromise our "Anglo" assimilation around a concerted effort to recall and preserve our unique and ancient Roman, Moorish and Aztec heritage and legacy as it continues to stir the spiritual



(Top and above)
Roman amphitheatre
1600 B.C.; (right)
Observatory, Monte
Alban Zapotec,
Oaxaca, Mexico;
(below) View from
Castelo in Moorish
Wall City, Portugal;
(bottom) Roman
bridge 25 B.C. with
modern bridge in
background over
"River Guadiana."

