

The NEGRO WHO FREED MEXICO

"After a mock trial, he was shot
and Killed"



Or
**From Slave to
President**
by
J. A. ROGERS

NEGRO SLAVE was the George Washington and the Lincoln combined of Mexico. And he was also its second president. Mexico, at that time, was larger than the United States.

Vicente Guerrero was born at Ixtla, Mexico, 1782. His father was Juan Pedro Guerrero and his mother, Maria Guadalupe Saldana, of mixed Negro and Indian parentage. Perhaps there was a white strain for he is often referred to as a half-caste, and Larousse, foremost French encyclopedia, speaks of him as a "mulatto slave" (esclave, mulatre) "who led the fight for Mexican independence."

Guerrero began life as a mule-driver. His people were the lowest of the low. They were degraded by law, custom and prejudice, and hindered in every way from rising. Unlike Lincoln, Guerrero hadn't the slightest chance to learn to read. He was nearly forty before he knew a letter of the alphabet.

In 1810 when Guerrero was twenty-eight, the struggle for Mexican independence began, led by a brilliant priest, named Hidalgo. The Mexicans were heavily taxed by Spain, all commerce with foreign countries was forbidden, as well as all home manufacture.

Hidalgo planted grape vines to make his own wine, and the Spanish government tore them up.

Wine must be bought from Spain. At this time too, the Mexicans were called on to pay an additional tax of forty-five million dollars—an enormous sum those days—to Spain.

Really the complaint that the American colonists had against King George was nothing in comparison with that that the Mexicans had against the king of Spain.

GUERRERO DISTINGUISHES HIMSELF

Hidalgo declared the independence of his country and called on all Mexicans to follow him. Among the first to respond was Guerrero. In the first battle Guerrero distinguished himself, and was made captain. Armed almost only with pitchforks the Mexicans, most of whom, like Guerrero, came from the lowest element, were victorious.

Among the number was also another Negro who is described by Villaseñor, Mexican historian, as being "very black, of horrible appearance and extraordinary bravery." His name was Juan del Carmen. Later he was made a colonel and became the close friend and supporter of Guerrero until killed in battle.

The Mexicans were at first successful but finally gave way before the Spaniards. One by one the leaders, Hidalgo, Morelos, Allende, Aldama, Jimenez, Mina, were captured and beheaded. Others accepted the king's pardon.

All but one: Guerrero. "Forsaken by for-

tune, betrayed, without money, without arms," says Villaseñor, "with only his will power left, he was at this time of desolation and despair the only supporter of the cause of independence, causing to shine forth his valor, prudence, profound sagacity, indefatigable activity, and heroic constancy."

"Even in the darkest days of the long revolution," says Rives, "he was the leader of a little body of unconquered men, who kept alive the cause of independence."

The government even sent his father, Pedro, to plead with him, offering him lands and wealth, but Guerrero was firm. He had pledged himself not to rest until the hated Spaniard was driven into the sea. He never spared the life of a Spaniard nor asked for mercy from one.

GUERRERO WINS TWO BATTLES

Finally the Spaniards sent Gen. Iturbide after him. Guerrero whipped Iturbide in two battles. Iturbide had high ambitions. He wanted to rule Mexico. He had bought up the army, but Guerrero was in his way.

He arranged with Guerrero for a parley, during which he told Guerrero that he had had a change of heart; that he believed the Mexicans were right, and would come over to them if Guerrero would side with him.

The latter, placing full faith in him, agreed.

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The Spanish government yielded. Guerrero, who sought nothing for himself, named Iturbide head of the Mexican republic.

But no sooner had Iturbide got into power than he began to show his true colors. What he did then is probably the cause of all the disturbance that exists in Mexico even to this day. A royalist at heart, Iturbide named himself emperor and continued the oppression of the masses.

Guerrero, whose great aim was the liberation of the masses, declared war against Iturbide, who was captured and executed. A new president was elected, with Guerrero vice-president.

With the Spaniards now out, the struggle in Mexico took another shape: that between the landed classes and the masses. Freemasonry at this time invading Mexico, the poor took the York rites, and the rich the Scottish rites. Guerrero, always a man of the common people, was named head of the York lodge.

The time came for another election, with two candidates for the presidency: Guerrero and Pedraza. Every effort was made by the common people to elect Guerrero, while the rich did their best for Pedraza. Finally 10 legislators declared for Pedraza, electing him. Guerrero got only eight. There was no manhood suffrage.

At this news revolt broke out all over the nation, and a proclamation was issued naming Guerrero president. It ran:

"The name of the hero of the south is repeated with unspeakable enthusiasm. His valor and constancy combined have engraved themselves upon the hearts of the Mexican people. He is the image of their felicity. They wish to confide to him the delicate and sacred task of executive power."

MADE PRESIDENT

Three days later the government surrendered, offering to make Guerrero minister of war. But the people wanted him as head of the nation, and the Mexican congress passed a law making him so. In April, 1825, he was inaugurated.

Guerrero at once set about improving the condition of the masses, composed largely of Indians, half-breeds, and a small percentage of Negroes. He ordered schools to be built, established free libraries, declared religious liberty—reading had been forbidden; established a coinage, suspended the death penalty, and took other steps far in advance of his time.

But that was not all.

Guerrero had been inspired by the American constitution. But he went further. He ordered the immediate liberation of every slave in the republic. A reading of the Mexican constitution, much of it the work of Guerrero, shows it to be as liberal as any that was ever penned. One of its clauses reads:

"All inhabitants, whether white,

African or Indian, are qualified to hold office."

Guerrero's emancipation proclamation was carried into effect almost without disturbance, because chattel slaves were comparatively few. In one part of the republic, however, it made a tremendous stir, and that was Texas.

The Texans were Americans who had migrated into Mexico, headed by Stephen Austin. They had come there to escape anti-slavery agitation in the United States. Now they had jumped from the frying pan into the fire.

Guerrero, however, was unable to enforce his decree in Texas. He was busy fighting his enemies in the capital, but the good work he had started bore fruit, and the slaves there were freed a few years later.

Guerrero's emancipation proclamation, it must be noted, was more effective than Lincoln's. Lincoln freed only those slaves in territory held by the Confederates. The American slaves were really freed by the 13th amendment, which was passed after Lincoln's death. Had Lincoln lived it is extremely doubtful whether the slaves would have been freed when they were. Lincoln was a conciliator, not a destroyer of slavery, and had he lived the slaves would, in all probability, have been held another five or six years in apprenticeship to their masters, as had been the case in all the British dominions, in Brazil, and elsewhere.

GREATER THAN LINCOLN

Hence, Guerrero was something more than a Lincoln.

He was, too, as beautiful a character as Lincoln. Guerrero sought nothing for himself. "Iturbide," says Bancroft, noted historian, "owed his

position to the abnegation without limit, to the patriotic virtues of Guerrero."

He adds: "He was possessed of a gentleness and magnetism that inspired love among his adherents; while his swarthy face, resonant voice and flashing eye made him an object of profound respect even among his enemies."

"Not even his enemies," says George Creel, "denied his patriotism, courage and incorruptible honesty."

Guerrero, in power, had formidable enemies among the landed classes.

Nearly all of them were men of education, while he could barely read. But, lacking education, he possessed heart, generosity and a forgiving spirit. These were his undoing, for the time called for hard-handedness. Finally he was driven out of power as being incapable.

"The rebels," says Bancroft, "could not bear the sight of one of Guer-

rero's race occupying the presidential chair, and rushing to destroy the government whose ruin falls on them."
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cessive clemency and liberalism."

GUERRERO IS CAPTURED

Fleeing to the mountains, Guerrero gathered an army, and for four years defeated every force sent against him, although he had been weakened by a ball that had lodged in his chest while fighting Iturbide. Finally his rival, Gen. Bustamente, bribed a ship captain, named Picaluga, to entice Guerrero on his ship and sail off with him. Picaluga and Guerrero were old friends.

Accepting the invitation to come on board, Guerrero was taken to a port and handed over to Bustamente. After a mock trial, he was shot and killed.

At news of his death a wave of anger swept over the Mexican people. Bustamente was driven from the presidency and was forced to flee for his life. Picaluga, who had received \$15,000 for his treachery—a great sum in those days—was sentenced to death.

A pension was paid Guerrero's widow; honors were conferred on the rest of his family; cities and a state were named in his honor; and in 1842 his body was removed to Mexico City, where the highest honors were paid his memory.

Every historian has condemned his execution. His failures, says one writer, proceeded from his virtues.

(THE END.)

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