

Vicente Guerrero: Mexico's First Black President



Vicente Guerrero

In 1782, in the Mexican village of Tixtla which borders the city of Acapulco was born a baby boy named Vicente Ramón Guerrero Saldaña. No one would have predicted that this boy from such humble beginnings would become powerful enough to fight Spanish colonialism and liberate his people. Guerrero was the son of an Afro-Mexican man named Pedro Guerrero, and a Mestizo mother named Guadalupe Saldana. As a child he worked with his father as a mule driver which allowed him to travel to various cities throughout Mexico. As he traveled he would learn about different ideologies of independence; these ideas would counter his parent's ideas which were in support of Spanish colonialism. Guerrero refused his father's wishes of pledging his allegiance to the Viceroy of New Spain, instead he joined General Jose Maria Morelos y Pavon, leader of the rebel army against Spain in the Mexican War of Independence in 1810. Guerrero was stationed in Southern Mexico when he joined Pavon in the war; his skills as a soldier and leader would first be on display during the battle of Izúcar in 1812. The battle of Izucar occurred on February 23rd between the royal Spanish forces and the Mexican rebels at Izúcar de Matamoros, Puebla, Mexico.

Guerrero's performance helped to improve on his military reputation during the battle of Izucar. He was able to lead his troops to victory during the capture of the city of Oaxaca in November of 1812; he was also promoted to lieutenant colonel of the rebel army. December of 1815, Jose Maria Morelos y Pavon was captured and executed by the royal Spanish forces. Guerrero became the "Commander in Chief" of the rebel forces after the death of Pavon. Pedro Guerrero the father of

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Vicente Guerrero attempted to once again persuade his son to surrender and end the resistance against Spanish tyranny. Guerrero refused his father's wishes by stating "My Motherland Comes First," this became the motto that the state of Guerrero would adopt. Under Guerrero the rebel army was very successful winning close to 500 battles using guerrilla warfare tactics to confuse and defeat the Spanish.

Guerrero would begin petitioning for Agustín de Iturbide to join his forces in the Mexican fight for independence against Spain. Iturbide was initially summoned by Spain to help suppress Guerrero and his rebel army. He eventually accepted Guerrero's offer and aligned with him under the plan de Iguala, or the plan of three guarantees. The plan of three guarantees proclaimed that Mexico would implement Catholicism as its primary religion, Mexico would gain its Independence from Spain, and equality would be implemented amongst the different social and racial groups of the Mexican society. Article 12 of the plan read: All inhabitants . . . without distinction of their European, African or Indian origins are citizens . . . with full freedom to pursue their livelihoods according to their merits and virtues. After Guerrero and Iturbide joined forces, Iturbide was declared the Emperor of Mexico by its congress and immediately abandoned the agreements made in the plan of three guarantees. Iturbide reinstated racism and classism into the Mexican society; Guerrero would then partner with Guadalupe Victoria and many others to rebel against Iturbide and his oppressive empire. Guerrero and Victoria were able to defeat Iturbide in March of 1823, which led to Guerrero becoming a member of the Mexican congress.

In September of 1828, Guadalupe Victoria became the first president of an Independent Mexico, while Guerrero became head of the "People's Party." In 1829, Guerrero became the second president of Mexico and the first president of African and indigenous Mestizo heritage. He used his power to change policies to end oppression in Mexico; he lobbied for public schools, land reforms, the development of Mexican industries and much more. September 16th, 1829 slavery was abolished by Guerrero, in doing so he created enemies and a rebellion began against his administration. Anastasio Bustamante, the Vice-President of Mexico did not agree with Guerrero's policies of ending slavery and racism, so he led a rebellion against Guerrero. Bustamante and his followers were able to remove Guerrero from the presidency in 1830, but Guerrero did not go without a fight. He returned to Southern Mexico and began a rebellion against Bustamante's administration.

Guerrero was eventually captured, tried and executed on February 14th, of 1831. It is stated that he angered the people of Mexico who wanted to maintain a system of Spanish European supremacy; therefore he died fighting to retain the freedom of the African and indigenous people of Mexico. Guerrero was a man with dark skin and profound African and indigenous features, who became the first president of Mexico to not resemble or reinforce Spanish European culture or colonialism. As a young mule driver traveling across the Mexican country Guerrero was a stout opponent against Spain and its oppressive rule. As a man he became a leader for his people and a national hero for his constant rebellions against Spain, and anyone who tried to oppress his people. Vicente Guerrero, we proudly stand on your shoulders.

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J.A. Ward.

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