

## COLUMBUS DAY: PART II: A HISTORIC SYMBOL FOR JEWS, LATINOS, NATIVE AMERICANS

### El Derecho Del Pueblo

Columna de comentario [Lecturas de Riesgo Político](#) abogado y maestro Matthew "Mateo" Katz.

### The People's Right

A column of social commentary [Destiny](#) and legal advice by attorney and teacher Matthew "Mateo" Katz.

"Que pasa? Que aqui todo el mundo habla Judio??"

This is what one Spanish Jewish immigrant was quoted as saying when he arrived in Mexico in the 16th Century, a new arrival in a new colony of Spain, looking for refuge in the midst of persecution against the Jews of his home country.

This immigrant's statement, upon arrival in the "New World," makes this author believe that Spanish is indeed a Jewish language! Yes, the nobility of Spain spoke the languages of European nobility, mainly French, or of the Spanish provinces from which they hailed: Catalan, Basque or Gallego. The "moors" or muslim rulers who governed much of Spain from 711 to 1492 spoke, of course, Arabic.

Only one group of residents on the Iberian peninsula lived with and consistently interacted with both the Christian Spaniards and the Spanish Muslims: the Jews. Thus, "Ladino" is the name of the language of the Sephardim, (Spanish Jews) and sounds just like 15th century Spanish, the period of the expulsion of Jews from Spain.

It must be remembered that Jews lived in Spain perhaps longer than any other culture: their presence in the Iberian peninsula dates back to almost the time of Jesus, when Jewish slaves were imported by the Romans to work on bridges and other infrastructure of the Empire. Indeed, when the Arabs arrived in Spain, they referred to the famed city of Granada as "Granata al-Yahud," or, Granada of the Jews.

What is surprising is that today so few Jews or Latinos are cognizant of any of this history. When I arrived in Granada, Spain during my college years, to study Spanish history and politics, I was absolutely ignorant that my pueblo had such ancient roots there! Nor did I know, when I arrived in Monterrey, Mexico some months before that, of the fact that the Mexican province was founded by a Jewish immigrant conquistador, Luis de Carvajal.

In 1492 the Spanish Crown signed an expulsion order requiring the hundreds of thousands of Jews in Spain to convert, leave the country, or be burned at the stake. However, the Crown had no problem with these Jews leaving Spain to help colonize the New World in the Spanish image. On May 31, 1579, the Crown issued a charter to Don Luis de Carvajal to rule over and develop the new “Nuevo Reino de Leon,” or what we know today to be the state of Nuevo Leon. Don Luis was directed to assimilate the natives and facilitate the settlement of Spanish immigrants. Indeed, the crest of the state of Nuevo Leon is almost identical to that of the Tribe of Judah, one of the ten tribes of ancient Israel.

The story of Luis de Carvajal is not unlike that of thousands of other Jews who immigrated to the Americas to continue to practice their traditions and escape the flames of the inquisition and expulsion in Spain. Indeed, within two generations of the conquest of Mexico, Mexico City had more than one dozen synagogues. However, within another hundred years, all of these Jewish temples were gone: the Crown realized that many of its Jews had fled to its colonies to continue being Jews, in violation of its orders.

So, the inquisition spread to the Americas, where countless numbers of now Mexican and South American Jews were tortured and murdered, synagogues burned to the ground, and hundreds of thousands of now Latino Jews went underground, hiding their history and heritage.

You can check the list of last names that are sure to have some Jewish heritage at the website for “Sephardim,” the Hebrew term for Spanish Jews at [www.sephardim.com](http://www.sephardim.com). Or, you can get involved to further investigate this historic link between Latinos and Jews by joining the Chicago Alliance of Latinos and Jews. Their website is [www.latinosandjews.org](http://www.latinosandjews.org)

During this month of Columbus Day, it behooves us to remember the history of all of those who

made the Americas, to remember the suffering of the millions of Jews and natives who were tortured and deprived of their identity, and to remember the edict signed by Queen Isabela on that same year Columbus sailed the ocean blue, because in Spain it was also the year in which they kicked out the last Jew: "...it is agreed and resolved that all Jews and Jewesses are hereby ordered to leave our kingdoms and that they never be allowed to return." Signed, March 31, 1492.