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## THE VIRGIN OF GUADALUPE

Andrew Wiget

In the year 1531 — ten years after the Spanish under Cortés took the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan — the Virgin Mother of Jesus of Nazareth appeared on Mount Tepeyac and spoke in Nahuatl, the Aztec language, to an Aztec Indian named Juan Diego. She told him to tell the Spanish bishop of Mexico to build a church for her on the spot. After two failures to persuade the bishop, the Virgin made roses grow in December on an arid piece of desert and then told Juan Diego to take them in his cloak to the bishop. When he opened his cloak, the roses spilled out, revealing the Virgin's image. The bishop was persuaded and the image on Juan Diego's cloak is enshrined today in the church he ordered to be built.

Because of the Virgin's dark complexion, her Nahuatl speech, and her appearance on Tepeyac (also the site of a shrine dedicated to the Aztec earth-mother goddess Tonantzin), she celebrates the Indian inheritance of Mexico. Today, wherever people of Mexican descent celebrate with pride their heritage and their history of struggle for personal and national identity, the Virgen de Guadalupe appears as the mother of *la nueva raza*, "the new race."



Los Danzantes of Tortugas carry the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe into the Casa del Pueblo for an all-night wake, El Volorio. Photo by Pamela Bamert



Frank Alderet's *bajado* (lowrider) carries the image of the Virgin on the hood. Photo by Miguel Gandert



Wood *santos* carving of the Virgin of Guadalupe by Sabatina Lopez Ortiz. Photo by Lyle Rosbotham