

HATUEY - Arawak Chief & first National Hero of Haiti

Hatuey (pronounced AH-TWAY) was born and raised in Haiti (correctly pronounced AY-TI by Arawak & French speakers).

Following the Spanish conquest of the island (the entire island was known by the name Quisqueya before the European invasion - and was re-named Ay-ti - which means 'place of sorrow' by the Arawak survivors), Hatuey witnessed the atrocities committed by the Spanish conquistadores against his Arawak people such as: Enslavement (for the Amerindians were sold as slaves by the Europeans long before the African) to dig for gold or do field labour, the raping of Arawak females from little girls to old women, beating to death of Arawak males from young boys to old men - and even the feeding of Arawak newborns and children to the dogs of the Spaniards - were all recorded by the Spaniards themselves as punishments they inflicted on the 'heathen savages'.

Soon after an unsuccessful rebellion in Haiti Chief Hatuey retreated to Cuba to recruit more warriors to fight a guerrilla war from the mountains of Eastern Cuba (Fidel Castro would successfully do the same over 400 years later), after many victorious battles Hatuey and his Arawak Guerrilla Army were eventually defeated and lost the war; Chief Hatuey was captured by the Spaniards and they sentenced him to be burned to death at the stake.

Before his execution a Spanish priest tried to convert Chief Hatuey to Christianity by force (which is how most Amerindians in the entire Western Hemisphere were Christianised). The priest explained to him that if he agreed to be baptized "his soul would be cleansed from all sins against God". Chief Hatuey asked the priest "After being baptized where will my spirit go?" The priest replied "To Heaven", to which Chief Hatuey asked "And the Spaniards, where do their spirits go?"; the priest replied "They are Christians so they will also go to heaven". As soon as Chief Hatuey heard that he told the priest "Then do not baptize me - for I would rather go to Hell than to spend eternity with such wicked people"

Today in the 21st century, Chief Hatuey is officially recognised as the First National Hero of Cuba - and is still honoured there. Many monuments have been built in his honour, hence although Cuba was not his birthplace - he is still remembered and exalted there. One wonders why the governments of Haiti and the Dominican Republic do not see fit to do the same - instead a colossal statue to honour the villain Columbus stands in the Dominican Republic - the same mis-guided country where Columbus's alleged remains are treated as though they were sacred relics.