

# INTRODUCING THE MEXICAN **TRIQUI POPULATION** IN THE CAPITAL REGION

*Welcoming the Triqui community  
and assisting them to contribute  
to New York State's Capital Region  
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*The Triqui people are an indigenous population originating in the southwestern part of the Mexican State of Oaxaca.*



*The first "Day of Triqui Culture" in the Capital Region at the University at Albany, April 12, 2014*





# CONTENTS

**MESSAGE FROM SECRETARY OF STATE CESAR PERALES . . . . .2**

**LETTER FROM THE CONSUL GENERAL OF MEXICO IN NEW YORK AMBASSADOR SANDRA FUENTES-BERAIN . . . . .3**

**THE TRIQUI PEOPLE: AN INDIGENOUS MIGRATION . . . . .5**

**THE TRIQUI PEOPLE IN THE CAPITAL DISTRICT . . . . .6**

**APPENDIX 1: . . . . .8**

**Nana nagan’ rihaan nij síí chihaan’** | Consejos para la gente Triqui | Words of counsel for the Triqui people

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS . . . . .8**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .9**

*A traditional Triqui dance.*





## A MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY

From Buffalo to Brentwood, Syracuse to Spring Valley, Plattsburgh to Port Jefferson, New York State continues to welcome newcomers from across the globe. While immigrants continue to enter New York City, they are also rejuvenating former thriving suburbs of the City and reinvigorating our upstate cities and towns.

Hicksville--the bustling town on Long Island where Billy Joel grew up--lost more than 3,300 native-born Americans in the last decade while gaining nearly 4,000 immigrants who stabilized the community. In neighboring Suffolk County, Brentwood experienced a similar situation. Even Sleepy Hollow in Westchester, whose legend was made famous by Washington Irving, would have lost population had it not been for its recent immigrants. In upstate, Syracuse, one of the state's largest cities and the hub of Central New York, had its population stabilized by newcomers from China, Vietnam and Cuba. This migration is changing our preconceived notion of immigrants only populating New York City.

The rise of the Mexican Triqui population in the State's Capital Region exemplifies the increased importance our State's cities, towns and villages play in the integration of newcomers. While the Triqui speak their own non-Spanish language and have their own traditions, they migrated to our State like many of our families, to build a better life for themselves and their families.

On behalf of the family of New York, I welcome the Triqui community to the Empire State. I look forward to Triqui and the rest of the immigrant communities continuing to play an important role in our State's future.

Sincerely,

Cesar A. Perales  
Secretary of State of New York



**A MESSAGE FROM THE COUNSUL GENERAL OF MEXICO IN NEW YORK, AMBASSADOR SANDRA FUENTES-BERAIN**

*"I've always argued that this country has benefited immensely from the fact that we draw people from all over the world."*

**Alan Greenspan**

The movement of people around the world contributes to the diversification of modern societies. But it also brings many challenges to the notions of ethnicity and identity. Yet people find ways to overcome these challenges, so that diversity in a society enriches its structure and becomes something to celebrate rather than to divide.

Mexico's cultural and ethnic fabric is woven with a great variety of groups that have contributed to the tapestry that is our country. In the same way, many peoples have built the United States of America, including ethnic groups that have successfully paved their own way on American soil, and contributed to enrich the history of a great nation.

Mexico is among the most ethnically diverse countries of the world. To understand it, one must understand its peoples, and the contributions they have made throughout history. Within our territory, around 112 million persons share many lands, cultures, beliefs and languages. Close to 15 million are part of the 62 indigenous peoples recognized by the Mexican Constitution. Among them, is the Triqui people from the northwestern region of the State of Oaxaca - the most ethnically complex of Mexico's thirty-one states.

Oaxaca has the greatest number of distinct indigenous peoples and languages in the country. Its rugged geography contributes to this amazing diversity, allowing sixteen ethno linguistic groups to preserve their customs, ancestral traditions and individual languages to the present day.

Likewise, Triquis experience diversity within their own community through different aspects of their cultural and organizational structure. The three triqui language varieties linked to the three main settlements of Triquis in Oaxaca: Copala, Chichahuaxtla and Itunyoso; are a good example. The vast majority of the Triqui population speak one of these language varieties. Understood as an essential element of social identity, this represents an undeniable manifestation of the liveliness of this group.

The establishment of the Triqui community in the United States is recent. Fifteen years ago they started migrating to California to become part of the farm labor force. Today we celebrate the existence of an important Triqui population in the County of Albany, in New York State. A population that continues to enrich the configuration of a State in which more than 20% of its residents are foreign born.

*(continued next page)*



Mexico is committed to supporting its nation’s diverse communities living abroad. Through our consular network in the United States, which comprises 50 Consulates, we promote innovative programs to facilitate the integration of the Mexican immigrant communities -regardless of their origin- to the civic, economic and cultural life of their new places of residence. Communities formed by people who come to the United States to work hard and start businesses in search of better lives.

Aware of the unique barriers that indigenous immigrants face because of their cultural and language differences, the Consulate General of Mexico in New York is working on a new project entitled “Mapping the Mexican indigenous communities in the tri-state area”. The objective is to determine their total population, their places of origin and destination, as well as to identify the main challenges that they face, in order to design more adequate action strategies to help them overcome those challenges.

As Consul General of Mexico in New York it is my honor to applaud the great work of the State University of New York, Institute for Mesoamerican Studies and the Department of Anthropology, in contributing to the better understanding and preservation of the heritage of the Triqui people, by hosting a “Day of Triqui Culture”.

To the New York State Office for New Americans, I express my deep gratitude for the welcoming of the Triqui community in the State’s Capital Region. Through these actions, New York State is honoring the history of the United States of America and strengthening its future.

As stated by the United Nations Organization, a rightful exchange and dialogue among civilizations, cultures and peoples, based on mutual understanding and respect, is an essential element to build social unity and reconciliation between peoples.

Sincerely



Ambassador Sandra Fuentes-Berain



## THE TRIQUI PEOPLE: AN INDIGENOUS MIGRATION

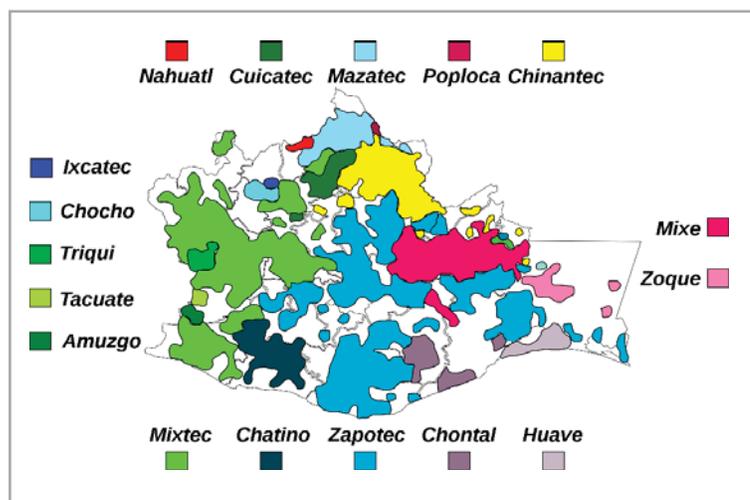
Immigrants from countries as diverse as Mexico, Burma and Russia continue to seek opportunity in New York State. While the diversity of our newcomers' home countries is impressive, the rise of indigenous peoples entering New York has become an interesting study of integration and success in the U.S. There is no better example of this migration pattern than the growth of the Triqui population in the Capital Region.

In the early 20th century, pioneering studies on Mexican migration to the U.S identified all immigrants as Mexicans, even though signs of ethnic differentiation within such migration flow existed (Gamio, 1930; Durand, 1991). The ethnic differentiation was not highlighted despite it being an important factor to Mexico and the U.S., where indigenous and racial differentiations are historically, socially and culturally significant. The Triqui people are one example of this difference.

The Triqui people are an indigenous population originating in the southwestern part of the Mexican State of Oaxaca, a state defined by its

indigenous population. While the geographic isolation of the mountainous Triqui native land in Oaxaca and the political unrest experienced by their home communities makes an exact count of the Triqui population difficult to assess, estimates from Mexico's census bureau calculate a domestic and migrant Triqui population of between 30,000 to 40,000 people.

While the Triqui are Mexican citizens, they adhere to a distinct set of customs separate from their countrymen. For a long time the Triquis exemplified the archetypical and traditional indigenous ethnic group, a sort of



Indigenous peoples of the state of Oaxaca

insular community (Wolf, 1957) with characteristics such as: kinship based in lineages groups, religion based in pre-Hispanic beliefs in conjunction with the catholic religion, agricultural based consumption and territory in a rural area (Huerta, 1981). However, in terms of immigration, this population has elaborated a self-conscious and deliberate concept of ethnicity where political participation, kinship, *fiestas tradicionales* (traditional festivities) among other things, are actively involved in the idea of a common root (Kearney and Nagengast, 1990).

These customs have not been without controversy as they transition into life outside of Oaxaca and abroad. For example, home births, opinions



on drinking in public<sup>1</sup> and the use of a consent-based dowry system for marriage has been misunderstood by receiving communities.<sup>2</sup>

Along with distinct customs, the Triqui language, which until now has remained for the most part an oral language, sets them apart from other Mexicans. Some Triqui grow up in Oaxaca speaking only Triqui. In fact, it is not uncommon for Triqui people to learn Spanish after they migrate abroad. For example, they may have learned Spanish in the U.S. where the Triqui may use Puerto Rican or Dominican calques as opposed to expressions used in their native country.

### THE TRIQUI IN THE CAPITAL REGION

Fleeing poverty and political violence<sup>3</sup>, the Triquis began migrating to the U.S in the 1980s to San Quintin, Baja California and then in the 1990s to California. Like many other southern Mexicans, many Triqui men and women traveled to the U.S. as day laborers or migrant workers. Triqui migration started to include New York State's Capital Region in 1989 and significantly increased in 2007 as a result of heightened violence their communities of origin were experiencing. According to Triqui folk historian Roman Vidal, today more than 600 Triquis call the Capital District their home, a significant increase from the six that initially arrived to the area.<sup>4</sup> This represents one of the most significant Triqui populations outside of Mexico.



Copala Triqui people at a wedding.

Triquis have developed different networks to migrate to New York, many of them through kinship, an important institution in their organizational system. Triquis accepted three kinds of kinship, *Tuvi' rá tucua'* kinship by consanguinity, *Tuvij man rá tucuj* kinship by affinity and *Tuvi' sii chuman'*, a sort of communitarian kinship. In this sense the Triquis organizational structure is based on these principles, where the familiar and communitarian networks are essential and primary to building a new life in

a new place. Meanwhile, a strong sense of belonging to the Triqui community helps them preserve their language, culture, gastronomy and traditions in a place outside their ancestral territory. For the Capital Region Triqui population, reciprocity and cooperation is important to support the link between their families. Capital Region Triquis expect their members to organize and participate in activities within their group to reinforce their relationships.

At first, the primary reason for migrating to the Capital Region was its geographic proximity to larger cities and relatively easy access to employment, especially in comparison to that of the southern borders states. Unlike other

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1 Bacon, David  
2 Scipione, Ruth  
3 Bacon, David  
4 Scipione, Ruth



places in the U.S. with large Triqui population where the population works on farms, Triquis in the Capital Region primarily work in the restaurant industry and similar blue-collar jobs. Beyond employment, however, the Capital Region became a place of opportunity in various regards, as the Triqui community found social diversity and better economic and educational opportunities for their families, as well as a place to raise their children in peace. Nevertheless, life has not been without its challenges, challenges to their ideas on gender,

labor, child education, urban life, etc. Their organizational structure has experienced changes on an individual, family and community level resulting in a significant transformation to their societal values. For example, Triqui women in U.S. have been integrated to the labor force and have more educational opportunities than in Mexico, providing an opportunity for the community to rethink gender stereotypes and to forge different types of social relationships within families. In fact, there are a handful of successful Capital Region small businesses which are Triqui-owned and operated and there are a number of Triqui families who have children currently in college.

The Capital Region is home to several examples of successful Triqui, like Cuauhtémoc Vidal Guzman. In 2004, Guzman migrated to Latham from Mexico unable to speak English. However, in a short time, he mastered the language and successfully finished high school. Cuauhtémoc went on to pursue a degree in Anthropology at SUNY Albany, where he thrived academically, not only making the Dean's list, but also receiving the schools' Spellman Award for Academic Excellence. He graduated summa cum laude in 2012 as a member of the Honors Society of the Anthropology department. Today, he is pursuing his master's degree at the University of Colorado, Boulder with plans to pursue his PhD.

Much like Cuauhtémoc, several other young Capital Region Triqui men and women are pursuing higher education, such as Jose Fuentes Jr., Benjamin Fuentes and Monica de Jesus. Meanwhile, other young Capital Region Triqui have obtained U.S. citizenship. Together, they are contributing to the local economy and are the backbone of various local businesses, and have even purchased their own home, fulfilling their American dream.

So significant is the Capital Region's Triqui community that the first Triqui language dictionary is being published from work undertaken to study the language and the population in Albany, NY. Professor Broadwell of the State University of New York at Albany and Triqui community folk historian Roman Vidal recently published the first online Triqui-Spanish-English dictionary (<http://copalatriqui.webonary.org/>) after more than ten years of research, with plans to share the dictionary with the Triqui communities in Mexico and the United States. Meanwhile, the same research team has recorded other folkloric texts of the oral tradition such as *The Origin of the Sun and Moon: A Copala Triqui Legend*<sup>5</sup> and "Nana nanguan' rihaan nij sii chihaan': Consejos para la gente Triqui: Words of counsel for the Triqui people"<sup>6</sup> and has sparked the interest of other area researchers in furthering their knowledge of this culturally rich community.

Welcoming the Triqui community and assisting them to contribute to New York State's Capital Region is an example of the State's legacy as a place of opportunities and immigrant pride. While the Capital Region's Triqui community faces the same integration issues experienced by other immigrant communities, they have a set of unique barriers they must overcome in order to fully integrate into the region's economy and society. For example, the lack of sufficient knowledge and understanding of their rights and responsibilities in their adoptive homeland led to the tragic 2010 death of Marcos de Jesus Alvarez.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, a significant number are Triqui males between the ages

<sup>5</sup> So much interest exists in this work that this folkloric text was even translated into Japanese by Kosuke Matsukawa

<sup>6</sup> See Attachment #1

<sup>7</sup> Grongahl, Paul



of 14 to 26 have little formal education. Improving access to educational services and recognition of this group’s unique culture and language will help improve the Triqui community’s ability to participate in the State’s civic and economic life. ❖

*New York’s Office for New Americans (ONA) recognizes the valuable contributions of the Triqui community and, in its hope to enhance and facilitate their participation in their new home, the ONA has reached out to this community. ONA believes that its services of English language, naturalization assistance and entrepreneurial training, are uniquely geared towards the needs of this population. The ONA looks forward to further extending these services to them.*

### APPENDIX 1

**Nana nagan’ rihaan nij síi chihaan’** | Consejos para la gente Triqui | Words of counsel for the Triqui people is a discourse on the sources of discord within the Triqui community, moral behavior, and opportunities for . . . peace making. It was written in Copala Triqui by Roman Vidal Lopez, and edited and translated by George Aaron Broadwell, Ashley LaBoda, Sharone Horowitz-Hendler, and Gabriela Aquino-Dehesa. This is the first book written in Copala Triqui by a native speaker of the language.

Direct link: [http://www.albany.edu/ims/Publications/IMS\\_OcPub16.pdf](http://www.albany.edu/ims/Publications/IMS_OcPub16.pdf)

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