

Santiago's Sword: Chatino Peasant Religion and Economics. By JAMES B. GREENBERG. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981. Map. Tables. Figures. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xii, 227. Cloth. \$18.50.

This anthropological study depicts the erosion of Amerindian community defenses in Santiago Yaitepec, a Oaxacan, Chatino town. In his year's stay there, James B. Greenberg examined in particular the decline of the fiesta system. He explored the consequences of coffee exploitation and the coming of capitalism to this town, a rise in personal violence and a distinct trend toward class segmentation.

This work is of particular interest to historians for its detailed analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the fiesta system. Just as under the Spanish colony, the cargo system of obligations to town saints maintains some degree of autonomy from civil authorities as control over labor and money contributions and the redistribution of common land output are defended against civil authority. Ironically, the greatest threat to town defenses stems from population increase; the cargo system suffers as the ratio of offices to households decreases. More households are removed from town obligations and internal expenditures, leaving families with a surplus that draws them into the market. The town becomes vulnerable to market forces.

Amerindian communities face and have faced a fundamental contradiction between survival within the "limits set by local ecological conditions," those very limits that Greenberg believes determine the beliefs and institutions of the fiesta system, and those imposed by the outside world whose actions are dictated by other circumstances. This contradiction is apparent in Chatino cosmology, which reflects the town "ecosystem" and ritual and its connection with the material world. It is symbolized in the pairing of nativist and European icons.

Greenberg's analysis and description of these syncretic beliefs and their accompanying rituals is excellent. He shows, for example, how "houses" and "doors" are metaphors for bonds among mortals, deities, and nature in the Chatino belief system. The cross above the door, the altar or the burial plot derives from pre-Columbian as well as Christian ritual, he argues. It marks boundaries, entrances, and passages between worlds.

This fine work adds to the growing mass of ethnohistoric, historic, and anthropologic works on fiesta systems. Individual case studies such as this reveal, I think, the complexity and great disparities between Amerindian groups that defy any but the broadest generalization. A general, overall study of contemporary and past fiesta systems is badly needed.

This study is marred, unfortunately, by a careless use of history as well as by an attempt to make a contemporary, ideological statement. The reader must wade through historical assumptions that are frequently distorted, wrong, or highly controversial. He uses, for example, eighteenth-century documentation from small localities to generalize the entire three-hundred-year colonial experience. Greenberg does not understand how much of the Spanish colonial system was precapitalist; it violates his rather simplistic view that the ideology of the Spanish colony was purely capitalist while that of Amerindia was purely precapitalist.

The ideological argument that runs through the book is repetitious. The reader must discard too much contemporary political discussion to appreciate the solid contribution Greenberg makes. But the book should be read; it is a solid contribution to the study of the evolution of Amerindian traditions.

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