

## Blast From the Past: Hispanic Presence

Michael Sean Winters | Aug. 30, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

This week, at the RCIA in my parish, I will be discussing the history of the Church in America. Ergo, this week I will use this space to highlight some of my favorite parts of that talk, especially the ones, like this one, which show the contemporary relevance of history:

As we mentioned, Columbus brought the Catholic faith with him and the first bishop to arrive in the Western Hemisphere was the bishop of Puerto Rico, Don Alonso Manso, who took possession of his see in 1513. Most of his cathedral was burned in the nineteenth century but parts of the church date back to the sixteenth century and up the street, the church of San Jose remains in tact. There is an historical notation in the church's architecture. The church sanctuary and transepts have beautiful stonework, but in the nave there is only stucco. The change represents the change of monarchs in Spain ? Charles V was a great patron of the Church and his son Philip II was less generous, so the church had to be finished with the less expensive stucco.

Spanish missionaries reached parts of what is now the United States from Mexico and Cuba. In 1565, the settlement at St. Augustine, Florida was begun and that remains the oldest European settlement in the continental United States. From Mexico, missionaries reached into New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, Louisiana and California. By the time of the Declaration of Independence, there were 100,000 Catholic Indians in New Mexico. The strong of missions in California can still be seen today. The most famous mission in Texas, the Alamo, had been secularized by the time it played its role in the War with Mexico but other missions in San Antonio were preserved and still function as parish churches. And, Father Junipero Serra and his colleagues built a string of missions which can still be seen in California at San Clemente, Santa Barbara, Carmel, San Francisco and other cities. The next time you hear one of these anti-immigrant activists tell Mexicans they need to ?go back where they came from,? remember that Mexicans' ancestors, like the ancestors of most people in the U.S., came from Europe and that the Mexicans got to most of the disputed regions along the border first.

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