

# Our Voice

Before the ecclesiastical authorities who doubted the *humanity* of the recently *discovered* indigenous of the New World, Friar Bartolomé de las Casas defended “a single structure of body and soul for all.” There is no need to go back to sixteenth-century Europe to recognize that today, as we are poised to enter the third decade of the twenty-first century, in Mexico we continue not having paid our debt to the first peoples. The profile of the indigenous was constructed little by little in the European imaginary through what they heard and intuited, through the stories of the conquistadors, almost always based on prejudices and stereotypes. That preconceived representation of the native civilizations navigated the ocean separating the two continents and took root in an America that until this day is incapable of coming to terms with its origins.

Article 1 of our Constitution prohibits discrimination, but in reality, exclusion based on racial origin continues to be an everyday practice. A single glance at the 2017 National Survey on Discrimination shows us that of the more than 25 million people who self-define as indigenous in Mexico, 14.6 percent say they have been discriminated against because of their appearance or language. Poverty indicators, a lack of opportunities, and the absence of public policies question the validity of the law and cast doubt on the will of an entire society to put an end to exclusion and racism fed by ignorance and unfamiliarity with the other.

Dedicating this issue of *Voices of Mexico* to the first peoples is a vow to banish those stereotypes and start down a road toward mutual understanding. Our identity as Mexicans stems from the preservation of the traditions and social and cultural traits of the first peoples: Maya, Nahua, Mixtec, Tzotzil, Purépecha, Kiliwa, and so many more. In this issue, different points of view converge in a single idea: Mexico's roots today are not to be found in the pages of books or inside glass cases in museums. With a critical, well-considered view, our contributors question the contradictions that define the relationships with our forebears, who inspire us, but whose descendants we also discriminate against; or the way in which anthropology and the state have approached the native cultures, as well as the presence of Mexican indigenous in the United States, migrant workers who support their communities with the remittances they send, and the students who learn and contribute knowledge in our northern neighbor's universities.

Miguel León Portilla, who we say good-bye to with admiration in this issue, used to say, “The world is made poorer when a language or a culture is lost, and it is also made poorer when everything is somehow made uniform.” Disseminating the linguistic and cultural diversity of the first peoples here is our small contribution against that potential impoverishment, but it is also our way of celebrating their traditions, their cuisine, and their art, turned into song, poetry, painting, dress, and everyday objects.

Another term for “first peoples” is “original peoples,” and “origins” are beginnings. With this issue of *Voices of Mexico*, we are proposing another beginning, another way of seeing ourselves and accepting who we are: the fortunate heirs of extraordinary cultural wealth. What a great opportunity it has been to publish the magazine jointly with specialists and recognized authorities in indigenous languages and cultures, very particularly, with Dr. Mario Humberto Ruz Sosa, the director of the UNAM Institute of Philological Research! Thank you. Thank you to all the contributors from the Institute of Philological Research and, of course, everyone else who inhabits the pages of this issue with their art and letters.

Graciela Martínez-Zalce  
Director of Center for research on North America  
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