

Central Coast: Past, Present, Future

## Does La Llorona Haunt The Central Coast?



**By Mark James Miller, September 9, 2018**

She's been seen in many places, a ghostly apparition that appears after dark, sometimes calling out, "Ay, mi hijos!" — "Ah! My children!" Other times she wails mournfully, and sometimes she is silent, emitting an eerie white light that is just as frightening as any sound she could make.

She is La Llorona, and her story begins in the Valley of Mexico at the time of the Spanish Conquest in the 16th century. From there she has spread to Central America and the United States. She is frequently seen on the Central Coast, as my students attest, for many claim to have encountered her themselves.

"I knew she wanted to take me," a student wrote, "for she came right at me with her arms outstretched."

Another related how she was playing outside after dark with some friends when they heard a terrifying wail, followed by a glowing white figure floating toward them. One of the children cried, "It's her! It's La Llorona!" They all fled in terror.

Like the Boogeyman, the specter of La Llorona is often used to frighten children and make them behave. Students have written they were told that La Llorona would take them if they didn't mind their elders.

"My mother claims she heard the cries of La Llorona in Mexico and said that if we didn't behave, she would appear some night and take us away," wrote one student. Another said, "It's a tale enabling parents to ensure their children stay indoors after dark."

Whatever her origins — and some believe the story actually pre-dates the arrival of the Conquistadors and derives from an Aztec earth goddess, Cihuacoatl — La Llorona is deeply embedded in Hispanic culture.

"Her haunting cries, terrifying those along the streams and rivers from Mexico to Central America to this day, make it very clear that Maria will never find peace ..." a student said, noting that her story "touches upon issues of motherhood, ladylike behavior, and life after death."

The most commonly-accepted version of the story of La Llorona is that long ago a young woman from a poor Mexican family named Maria married a wealthy man. When he leaves her for another woman, Maria, maddened with jealousy, seeks vengeance by drowning their children and herself in a river. Her spirit haunts the riverbanks, eternally searching for her lost offspring and crying out in a fearful wail, "Donde estan mis hijos?" — "Where are my children?"

Maria bears a strong resemblance to the Greek tale of Medea, daughter of King Aeëtes of Colchis, who betrays her father by helping Jason steal the Golden Fleece. Jason marries Medea but later leaves her for Glauce, the Princess of Corinth. Medea, feeling the same sort of hurt felt by Maria, kills their children in revenge.

The story of a creature that snatches children — especially misbehaving children — is found in many cultures. La Llorona also resembles a female spirit of the night like the

Banshee of Irish legend, whose terrifying wail portends that death is coming soon. Found in almost every culture worldwide is some version of the Boogeyman. Lurking in the dark, he waits for his chance to catch disobedient children so they'll never be seen again.

Whether real or just a projection of our subconsciousness, La Llorona exercises a strong grip on our Hispanic population and will doubtless continue to do so.

“Her story will continue to live,” a student wrote, “because parents will continue to tell it to their children. I know I will!” Another student put it simply: “I will forever be afraid of La Llorona.”

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