

## In Print

## Soul Sister

30th  
Anniversary  
EditionSOUL  
SISTERThe Story of a White Woman  
Who Turned Herself Black  
and Went to Live and Work  
in Harlem and Mississippi

GRACE HALSELL

By Grace Halsell  
Crossroads International; 1999

Grace Halsell, the white woman who left her White House job as speech writer and darkened her skin to live in segregated Mississippi, looks back on her experiences in a 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of her best-selling book, *Soul Sister*, released in November, 1999, by Crossroads International.

"If today I returned to re-live my *Soul Sister* experiences, it's not likely I would be arrested, as I was back in the late 1960s for stepping from a segregated black section of a bus station into a more commodious white section to use a telephone. Indeed, the wooden walls segregating blacks have been removed.

In some ways, she concludes, "conditions have changed for the worse - we know there are more black men imprisoned, for instance. We have more prisoners, per capita, behind bars than any country of the world. And a large percentage are men of color. Yet, based largely on the changes that resulted from the struggles of the 1960s, African-Americans have made significant economic and political progress in the past 30 years."

Still, she insists, the United States remains largely a divided nation, still without equal rights for those of color. And with mushrooming "hate" movements. "The Ku Klux Klan no longer operates with impunity, but we have a new generation of white supremacists fostering racial hatred and using affirmative action as their main target."

Halsell points out that when her former boss, President Johnson, first defined affirmative action, "he made no reference to racial preferences or quotas. He defined affirmative action as creating a level playing field, providing minorities with an equal opportunity in education and employment. The enemies of civil rights have today organized a nationwide effort against affirmative action, that they have redefined to mean racial preferences and quotas."

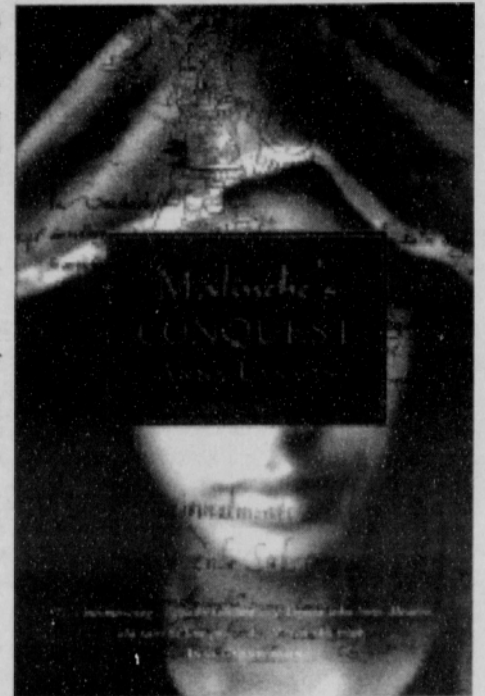
She concludes by observing that while much has changed politically and economically for blacks, "not much has advanced in social terms of integration. The tragedy and severity of our racial problems remain."

By Anna Lanyon  
Allen & Unwin; 1999  
Book Review by Jay  
Thiemeyer

In Mexico a 'malinchista' is a traitor, the lowest of the low. The original Malinche was the Mayan interpreter or go-between for Hernan Cortes, whose conquest of Mexico inspired the new category 'Conquistador'. Cortes was a no-nonsense adventurer (and womanizer, etc. - brutal, not to be denied) but without Malinche, the simple aboriginal woman of amazing courage, presence of mind and fortitude, Cortes would never have gained entry to the Court of Moctezuma and with it the heart of the Aztec Empire. He would have been a reckless, fearless scout for the Spanish throne forever lost to history. MALINCHE'S CONQUEST is as much a travelogue as history. A solution to Malinche's mystery can hardly be expected. The

event of her life, that of a Mayan girl abandoned to slavery, took place five hundred years ago. There is precious little evidence of any kind, much less concrete verifiable details. Cortes mentioned her by name only once in his numerous dispatches across the Atlantic. But with these scarce resources, Lanyon writes an involving, sometimes mesmerizing story. Malinche, the woman, is most fascinating as nationalist symbol and as myth, a link with the 'cosmic' Mexican past. She was made a symbol of betrayal by Mexican nationalist politicians. But she is only seen that way by those in power - the well-to-do and powerful in Mexico City. Among the mass of Mexican folks, especially the rural poor for whom Mexico City is another world, the mystique of Malinche is large and persuasive. A

chapter devoted to mythologies explains links to the goddess 'Woman Serpent', a potent force in pre-Spanish Mexico. Indeed, the folklore and legend - there is a volcano named for her, a river, ritualized seasonal dance practiced in myriad versions throughout the countryside offer up a highly sympathetic, nearly archetypal figure. Nobel laureate, Octavio Paz's most famous work was an essay on 'The Sons of Malinche', whose point is similar to Lanyon's own. Was the simple, courageous Myan girl, sold into slavery, thrown back for survival on her own wits, whose words literally unlocked the door to a new world, a traitor or was she a monumental victim of history which sacrifices whom it wishes and "constructs the heroes and villains we need" - more specifically, history according to those in power at this point in time.



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