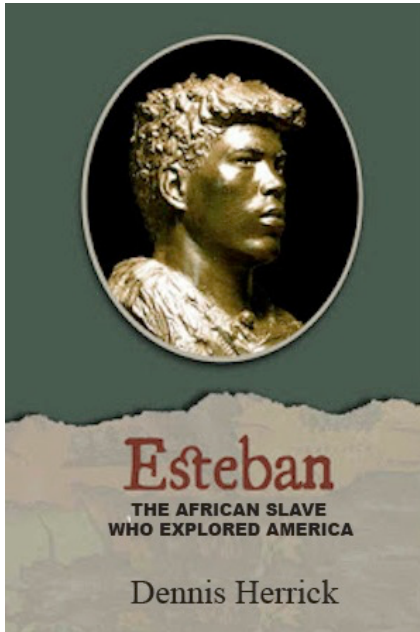


Esteban

The African Slave Who Explored America

— *A Discussion Guide* —



1. That curved line connecting the s and t is an old-fashioned and once common typographical mark called a ligature. The book designer thought it set a mood for a book that takes place in the 16th century. Do you agree?
2. The biography raises the question of why nearly all historical narratives declare as if it's a fact that Zuni Indians killed Esteban in 1539, despite that fate being only an assumption and never witnessed. Why and how did that story line get established? Should writers at least mention the possibility that there might have been a different, albeit unknown, outcome?
3. What racial stereotypes are evident in the usual depictions of Esteban that the biography points out about how other writers have described the African slave?
4. Which of the characters other than Esteban seemed the most interesting in the biography? In other words, which of them would you have liked to learn more about?
5. This biography takes Esteban out of the background in the Spanish chronicles and puts him in the foreground instead, focusing on him instead of the way that emphasis is always placed on the conquistadors. Discuss whether this change in perspective worked and whether it was justified.
6. Did you read the Preface and the Notes for the Modern Reader at the front of the biography, and were they helpful in understanding how the 16th-century environment was so different from today?
7. Were the endnotes at the back of the book helpful in better understanding the text? Or were they skipped over and not read? What is the value of endnotes, footnotes, or this biography's endnotes?
8. Discuss why Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, whose account is the basis of most of what is known about Esteban, often used the term of "El Negro" instead of Esteban's name. Did that set the tone for how Esteban's achievements were to be minimized by other early slave-owning Spaniards and later American writers?
9. Because he is often ignored or belittled in historical narratives, what impression did the biography give about the man? Did the biography change your view about Esteban's character and importance as a historical figure? In what ways?