The Resilience of the Mayas | Presented by Savannah Dixon | Assisted by Dr. Millie Gimmel

LAS PREGUNTAS | Research Questions

- How is the indigenous voice being preserved in modern society?
- Is indigenous representation accurate, glorified, or ignored?
- How important is cultural sensitivity and representation to indigenous Mayan culture?

PORQUE | Motivations

In the summer of 2012, I visited Guatemala for the first time. That was the first of three – soon to be four - trips to Guatemala to work with a children’s home outside of the capital.

Because of this trip, I added a Spanish double major, I applied for a Fulbright Grant, and decided to finish my degree in Hispanic Language and Literature with a self-directed study of the most widely spoken indigenous language in Guatemala: K’iche’.

The Mayan people and culture have become an integral part of my education and experience as a global citizen.

Over the past fifty years, films portraying Central America have increased. However, many represent only the crime, drugs, or stereotypical presumptions about the region being said, there are three films that represent the struggles, beauty, and truth of indigenous life in Mayan communities.

Heather Armadas (Men with Guns) - This film by John Sayles from 1997 tells the story of an aging doctor who goes into an unannounced, malaria-infected jungle to see his son who was delivered medicine to the indigenous people by a group of young health centers. During his journey, the doctor meets a young boy (Imagery 4), a descendent, and a priest. While they are wandering through the countryside, they see a beautiful woman and her talkative daughter speaking about a coming visitor who will help cure the mother’s leg. However, these women are not speaking Spanish, they are speaking an unidentified native language. This tone of mysticism and ideology, tied to the preservation of indigenous community hidden away from the “Hombres Armados,” represents the resilience of the Mayan in their constant quest for life in ever-present armed adversity.

El Norte - The journey through Central America to the United States is a passage that most Americans choose to ignore. Immigration and current political climates have made it difficult to think about those who come to the United States seeking refuge and safety from the oppression and violence of home. El Norte tells the story of how those who leave behind their culture in their home country, they run the risk of losing their culture in their new home. However, they quickly learn that the image of The North and the reality are not equal. After months of trying to adjust, Enrique loses his job as a respected waiter and Rosa's husband returns from a trip to his village. The family begins talking to their son about the realities of those who come to the United States seeking refuge and safety from the oppression and violence of home. El Norte tells the story of how those who leave behind their culture in their home country, they run the risk of losing their culture in their new home. However, they quickly learn that the image of The North and the reality are not equal. After months of trying to adjust, Enrique loses his job as a respected waiter and Rosa's husband returns from a trip to his village. The family begins talking to their son about the realities of those who come to the United States seeking refuge and safety from the oppression and violence of home.

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LA VOZ INDIGENA | The Indigenous Voice

In the Western Highlands of Guatemala, the Quiche’ people sustain their culture in dress, food, and language. The 'Kiche' language is spoken by over one million people in Guatemala making it the largest indigenous group and spoken language at the heart of indigenous populations. The Mayan people make up the largest indigenous group in the Americas with roughly six million people identifying as one of the twenty-three Mayan groups. Today, five million Mayans reside in Guatemala, and the largest group is the nation of Quiche'.

The Quiche’ nation was made famous in the 1980’s by the story of Rigoberta Menchu (Images 3, 5). – A Nobel Peace Prize winner and indigenous land rights activist. Her story of the treatment of indigenous peoples during the thirty-six year Guatemalan Civil War brought the Mayan people and the preservation of their culture to the attention of a global audience. Her testimonial, along with other cultural artifacts in film – Hombres Armados, El Norte, and Usurpaci – and text (Popol Vuh, Chichem Balam, and Shalom Canas) – work together to create a picture of indigenous expression. Juxtaposed in Spanish and indigenous languages, the story of indigenous resilience shifts slightly, but through these cultural artifacts, the indigenous voice – in both the mother tongue and colonial tongue – and language sustain the tradition, history, and expression of the Mayan people.

LA RESILIENCIA DE LOS MAYA

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This presentation will investigate, the language barriers to understanding traditional Quiche communities today. The practices, symbols, and characters in the Popol Vuh permeate the post-colonial class tensions in a changing world. Her story of the treatment of indigenous peoples is the core of the indigenous Mayan people. Her story of the treatment of indigenous peoples is the core of the indigenous Mayan people. Her story of the treatment of indigenous peoples is the core of the indigenous Mayan people.

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