



**Anth 2500 Cultures, Regions, Civilizations:
THE MAYA TODAY: FICTION AND REALITY**

Summer 2012. Maury Hall 113

Mo Tu We Th Fr 8:00 am - 10:15 am. Office hours: by appointment

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Course Description and Goals

The Maya have always excited the imagination of Western observers, ever since the two civilizations came into contact five centuries ago. Many aspects of their present and past culture have been both idealized and vilified by chroniclers, historians, nineteenth century explorers, anthropologists, journalists, and filmmakers. But do any of these images and discourses about the Maya circulated by Western outsiders contain a kernel of truth? What do Maya people make of these representations of their culture? In this course we will examine the cultural aspects of Maya civilization that have been mystified by Western imagination. For this reason, an important part of the course consists on analysis of audio-visual materials that have been produced by a variety of “outsiders” to Mayan culture. The emphasis of the course is on contemporary Maya cultures, although we will devote some sessions to aspects of the pre-Columbian Maya past that continue to be the object of movies, documentaries and new-age websites. The course is divided in three sections, in which we will cover the following topics:

- *Section I: The Making of the Past.* Main stages in the history of the pre-Columbian Maya, and some of their most famous cultural accomplishments. How is the Maya past reconstructed by archaeologists, explorers, and filmmakers? What impact do such reconstructions of ancient Maya culture have on the images that people have of the modern Maya?
- *Section II: Ethnographic Encounters.* Fundamental traits that define Maya identity and worldview, as discussed in ethnographies of modern Maya cultures. We will cover social organization, kinship, economic structure, religion and spirituality.
- *Section III: Contemporary Voices and Subaltern Representations of Maya Identity.* Current challenges of the socio-political context in which Maya people live, seen through the eyes of Maya spokespersons, anthropologists and journalists. Violence in the Maya world. The ethics of Maya scholarship, advocacy and activism.

Requirements and Policies

Required Readings (Available for purchase at the Student Book Store)

Burgos-Debray, Elisabeth. *I, Rigoberta Menchú. An Indian Woman in Guatemala.* Verso Editions. London: 1984.

Collab readings as assigned

Grade Breakdown

Presentation: 20%
Midterm exam: 35%
Final exam: 35%
Participation: 10%

Mid-term and Final Exam

There will be a midterm and a final exam, each is worth 35% of the final grade. The final exam will be comprehensive. Check the course calendar and the course website for updates on the date and location of the midterm and final exam.

Attendance

Attendance is absolutely mandatory. We will be taking attendance everyday in class. Every unexcused absence will result in the loss of 1 point off your final grade. If you cannot come to class because of a real problem, let us know *beforehand*. Being repeatedly late to class or leaving early may count as an absence. Please talk to us *in advance* if you have a justified reason to leave early. Absences for illness or university-related activities must be properly documented by written notice on official letterhead. Excuses by email are not acceptable.

Participation

You start out with an “A” in your participation grade, and it is yours to keep or lose. Here is how to keep it:

- 1) Come to all the classes, and be on time.
- 2) Prepare for the class. We expect you to do a critical reading of the course materials, and come ready to ask and be asked about anything in the readings. We will be evaluating the quality –not the quantity- of what you say. You are encouraged to ask as many questions as you need in order to ensure your understanding of the concepts covered in class.
- 3) Engage in “active watching.” The movies, documentaries, and footage that will be shown in class are intended to be “actively watched:” think of how these materials speak to the assigned readings of that day, and be ready to share your thoughts with the rest of the class.
- 4) “Participating” also means “paying attention,” and therefore, the (mis)use of media in class is strongly discouraged. So please, no laptops during lectures; only old-fashion note-taking by hand, which is also a great skill to practice in any anthropology class.

To sum up: if you come to all the classes, and you show us by actively participating in class that you have done your work, you get (keep) your “A”.

Research Project and Presentation

You will be assigned to a small group of 2-3 students, to present a research topic of your choice from a list of research topics which will be posted on Collab. You will be asked to turn in a brief description of the research topic, a bibliography of the sources you will use to prepare your presentation, a handout, and any additional materials you would like to count towards your presentation grade. More instructions and a presentation schedule will be posted on Collab.

Topic description due: Monday, June 18

Bibliography due: Friday, June 22

Academic Honesty

You are expected to comply with the University of Virginia Honor Code. For further information about what this means and for plagiarism guidelines, please check the University of Virginia Honor Committee website: <http://www.virginia.edu/honor/>

Calendar of Weekly Topics and Assigned Readings
Please continue to check this page; updates may be provided periodically

Introduction. Mesoamerica as a cultural area	Reading the Past: The hieroglyphic Writing System	Facts and myths about the Maya calendar. Maya Literature	Overview of Ancient Maya History	The Maya past recreated by Hollywood filmmakers
Apocalypto Cineforum	The life cycle. Kinship.	The Cargo System.	Syncretism, spirituality, personhood, nahualism.	Common sicknesses, curing techniques, shamanism, witchcraft. Midterm review
Economy and subsistence	Gender relations. Compadrazgo.	Attitudes towards wealth and prestige		
Midterm Exam	Human rights	The Zapatista revolution	The Maya genocide	The Menchú-Stoll controversy. The diaspora
Maya activism. Linguistic revitalization. Eco-tourism. Corporativism.	Student presentations	4 th of July, No class	Student presentations. Wrap up. Final Review	Final Exam

Monday June 11. Introduction LAST DAY TO ADD

Webster, David and Susan Toby Evans. Mesoamerican Civilization. In *The Human Past: World Prehistory and the Development of Human Societies*, Chris Scarre (ed). London: Thames and Hudson. Pp: 595-604.

Coe, Michael. *The Maya*. Seventh Edition. Thames and Hudson. New York: 2005.
 Chapter 1. Introduction. Pp: 10-14; 23-24; 26-31.
 Chapter 10. The enduring Maya. Pp: 245-252.

Section I: The Making of the Past

Tuesday, June 12. Reading the past: The hieroglyphic writing system

Coe, Michael. *The Maya*. Seventh Edition. Thames and Hudson. New York: 2005.
 Chapter 9. The nature of Maya writing. Pp: 229-234

Schele, Linda and David Freidel. 1990. *A Forest of Kings: the Untold Story of the Ancient Maya*. New York: William Morrow, 1990.
 Chapter 1. Time Travel in the Jungle. Pp: 50 (second full paragraph)-55

Wednesday, June 13. Facts and myths about the Maya calendar. Maya literature

Schele, Linda and David Freidel. *A Forest of Kings: the Untold Story of the Ancient Maya*. New York: William Morrow, 1990.

Chapter 2. The Shape of Time. Pp: 77-84.

Coe, Michael. *The Maya*. Seventh Edition. Thames and Hudson. New York: 2005.

Chapter 3. The Hero Twins and the Creation of the World. Pp: 65-66

Ralph Roys. *The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel*. Carnegie Institution of Washington. Publication n.438. Washington DC: 1933.

Introduction. Pp: 3-6 (stop at "Seventeenth Century originals")

A prophecy for Katun 4 Ahau. Pg: 161

Thursday, June 14. Overview of Ancient Maya history and society

Coe, Michael. *The Maya*. Seventh Edition. Thames and Hudson. New York: 2005.

Chapter 3. The Rise of Maya Civilization. Pp: 59-60

From Pre-classic to classic in the Maya Lowlands. Pp: 84-85.

Chapter 4. Classic Splendor: The Early Period. P: 87

Chapter 5. The Late Period. Pp: 111-115

Chapter 6. The Terminal Classic. Pp: 161-166. Skip section "Seibal and the Putun Area".

Stop at "the Pueblo cultures of the American Southwest"

Chapter 7. The Post-Classic. Pp: 177 -181

Schele, Linda and David Freidel. *A Forest of Kings: the Untold Story of the Ancient Maya*. New York: William Morrow, 1990.

Chapter 1. Time Travel in the Jungle. Pp: 57-63.

Start in page 57 at "Our story begins in this last phase of the preclassic period"

Friday, June 15. The Maya past recreated by Hollywood filmmakers

Callahan, Robey. Apocalypto in Cobá. In *Anthropology News*, September 2007.

Xiuhcutli, Nezahualcoyotl. Gibson's Apocalypto as an Act Against the Maya. In *Anthropology News*, September 2007.

Section II: Ethnographic encounters

Monday, June 18. Economy and Subsistence activities

Vogt, Evon. *Zinacantan. A Maya Community in the Highlands of Chiapas*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts: 1969.

Chapter 3. Subsistence Activities. Pages: 35-36, 44-65

Chapter 6. Economic and Social Aspects of Trading. Pp: 118-120

The economic system. Pp: 122-124

Tuesday, June 19. The Cargo system. Attitudes towards wealth and prestige

Vogt, Evon. *Tortillas for the Gods. A Symbolic Analysis of Zinacantecan Rituals*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976.

Chapter 2. Religious Organization. Pp: 27-30

Foster, George. Peasant Society and the Image of Limited Good. In *American Anthropologist*, 1965: 67. Pp: 293-315

Cancian, Frank. *Economics and Prestige in a Maya Community*. Stanford University Press. Stanford, California: 1965.

Chapter 8. The Functions of the Cargo System. Pages: 133- 138.

Wednesday, June 20. Life cycle, family life, kinship, compadrazgo

Vogt, Evon. *Tortillas for the Gods. A Symbolic Analysis of Zinacantecan Rituals*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976.

Chapter 2. The life cycle. Pp: 19-24.

Bunzel, Ruth. *Chichicastenango; A Guatemalan Village*. Locust Valley, N.Y., J.J. Augustin [1952].

Chapter 2. Betrothal; Ceremonies of marriage; Husbands and Wives. Pp: 109-122.

Thursday, June 21. Syncretism, spirituality, personhood, nagualism LAST DAY TO DROP

Watanabe, John. From Saints to Shibboleths: Image, Structure, and Identity in Maya Religious Syncretism. In *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Feb., 1990). Pp: 131-150.

Pitarch, Pedro. *The Jaguar and the Priest. An Ethnography of Tzeltal Souls*. University of Texas Press. 2010.

Chapter 2. Pp: 23-43

Friday, June 22. Common sicknesses, curing techniques, shamanism, witchcraft.

Cosminsky, Sheila. The Evil Eye in a Quiché Community. In *The Evil Eye*. Clarence Maloney (ed.) Columbia University Press. New York: 1976. Pp:163-165.

Redfield, Robert and Alfonso Villa Rojas. *Chan Kom*.

Chapter 10. "Cold" and "Hot" Pp: 160-164. "Ojo" 168-169.

Pitarch, Pedro. *The Jaguar and the Priest. An Ethnography of Tzeltal Souls*. University of Texas Press. 2010.

Chapter 8. Pages: 168-201.

Monday, June 25. Midterm.

No readings assigned

Section III. Contemporary Voices
and Subaltern representations of Maya identity

Tuesday, June 26. Human Rights

Stavenhagen, Rodolfo. Cultural Rights and Human Rights. A Social Science Perspective. In *Human Rights in the Maya Region. Global Politics, Cultural Contentions and Moral Engagements*. Pitarch, Pedro, Shannon Speed and Xochitl Leyva-Solano (eds.). Duke University Press: 2008.

Speed, Shannon and Xochitl Leyva Solano. Human Rights and the Maya Region. In *Human Rights in the Maya Region. Global Politics, Cultural Contentions and Moral Engagements*. Pitarch, Pedro, Shannon Speed and Xochitl Leyva-Solano (eds.) Duke University Press. 2008.

Read only the sections on. "The Maya Region" & "Human and Indigenous Rights in Chiapas and Guatemala" Pp: 2-8

Wednesday, June 27. The Zapatista Movement as "the first postmodern revolution"

Collier, George. *Basta! Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas*. Collier. Oakland, Calif.: Food First Books, 2005. Introduction 1-10

Parfit, Michael. "Chiapas, Rough Road to Reality". In Emerging Mexico, A Special Issue. *National Geographic* Vol. 190, 2. August 1996. Pp. 114-129

Thursday, June 28. The Maya genocide **LAST DAY TO WITHDRAW**

Burgos-Debray, Elisabeth. *I, Rigoberta Menchú. An Indian Woman in Guatemala*. Verso Editions. London: 1984.

Ch.1: The family;

Ch. 4: First visit to the finca;

Ch.6: An eight-year old agricultural worker;

Ch.7: Death of her little brother in the Finca. Difficulty of Communicating with Other Indians;

Ch.14: A maid in the capital;

Ch. 16: Period of reflection on the road to follow;

Ch. 17: Self-Defence in the village;

Ch. 19: Attack on the village by the army;

Ch.22. The CUC comes out into the open;

Ch.23. Political activity in other communities. Contacts with Ladinos;

Ch. 24. The torture and death of her little brother, burnt alive in front of members of their families and the community;

Ch. 25. Rigoberta's father dies in the occupation of the Spanish Embassy. Peasants march to the capital;

Ch. 32. Strike of agricultural workers and the first of May in the capital;

Ch.33. In hiding in the capital. Hunted by the army;

Ch.34. Exile.

Friday, June 29. The Menchú-Stoll controversy. The Diaspora

Stoll, David. *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*. Boulder, Colorado. Westview Press: 1999.

Preface. Pp: 8-15

Burns, Allan F. *Maya in Exile. Guatemalans in Florida*. Temple University Press. Philadelphia: 1993.

Chapter 1: Maya refugees and applied anthropology. Read only pp: 7-19

Chapter 4: The Maya in Community and Ethnic Context. 67-102

Monday, July 2. Maya activism. Linguistic and cultural revitalization. Eco-tourism. Corporativism

Watanabe, John M. Unimagining the Maya: Anthropologists, Others, and the Inescapable Hubris of Authorship. In *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol 14, No 1. Blackwell Publishing: 1995.

Hofling, Charles. Indigenous Linguistic Revitalization and Indigenous Interaction: The Itzaj Maya Revitalization Case. In *Human Organization*, 108-116. Vol 55. Nº 1, 1996.

Garzón, Susan, R. McKeena Brown, Julia Becker Richards, and Wuqu' Ajpub'. *The Life of our Language: Kaqchikel Maya Maintenance, Shift, and Revitalization*. Austin: University of Texas Press: 1998.

Chapter 7. Pp: 155-170

Van den Berghe, Pierre. Marketing Mayas. Ethnic Tourism Promotion in Mexico. In *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol 22. No.3, pp: 568-588. 1995.

Tuesday, July 3. Student presentations

No readings assigned.

Wednesday, July 4.

Independence Day Holiday. No class.

Thursday, July 5. Student presentations. Wrap-up and exam review.

No readings assigned

Friday, July 6. Final Exam.

Filmography

- Abrams, I.R (1994). *The Highland Maya: A Case Study in Economic Anthropology*. Fountain Valley.
- Bartz, S. (1998). *To The Roots: A Maya Reunion*. The Video Project.
- Caal, D. (1993). *Sacred Earth*. Cinema Guild.
- Carrescia, O. (1994). *Mayan voices: American lives*. New York :First Run/Icarus Films.
- Gibson, M. (2007). *Apocalypto*. Burbank, CA :Touchstone Home Entertainment.
- Kibben, J.(1993). *In Good Hands: Culture And Agriculture In The Lacandon Rainforest*. Oakland, California. The video project.
- MacDonald, B. (1991). *Cakchiquel Maya of San Antonio Palopo*. Granada Television.
- McKay, J. (1997). *Between Light And Shadow: Maya Women In Transition*. Berkeley Media.
- Payrastre, G.and Viallon, C. (1978).*Brujo: Shaman*. Watertown.
- Smith, H.(1985). *The Living Maya*. Extension Center for Media and Independent Learning. Berkeley, California.
- Smith, H.L. (1983). *The Yucatec Maya: A Case Study in Marriage and Family*. Insight Media.
- Vigesaa, K.; McKay, J. (1993). *Daughters of Ixchel*. Berkeley, CA :Berkeley Media, LLC
- Wild, N. (1998). *A Place Called Chiapas*. Zeitgeist Films.
- Yates, P.; Sigel, T. (1984). *When the Mountains Tremble*. New York :New Yorker Films
- Zurita de Higes, F. (1992). *Winds of Memory*. New York :First Run/Icarus Films