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)


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 loose. 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*

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**Monday June 11. Introduction**  
LAST DAY TO ADD


**Section I: The Making of the Past**

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

Chapter 9. The nature of Maya writing. Pp: 229-234

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

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


   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

   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
   Stop at “the Pueblo cultures of the American Southwest”

   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


Section II: Ethnographic encounters

Monday, June 18. Economy and Subsistence activities

   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


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


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


Chapter 2. Pp: 23-43

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


Redfield, Robert and Alfonso Villa Rojas. Chan Kom.


Monday, June 25. Midterm.

No readings assigned
Section III. Contemporary Voices
and Subaltern representations of Maya identity

Tuesday, June 26. Human Rights


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”


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


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 caical. Hunted by the army;
Ch. 34. Exile.
Friday, June 29. The Menchú-Stoll controversy. The Diaspora

Preface. Pp: 8-15

Chapter 1: Maya refugees and applied anthropology. Read only pp: 7-19
Chapter 4: The Maya in Community and Ethnic Context. 67-102


Chapter 7. Pp: 155-170


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


