Where are the Maya today?

The Maya from the Spanish Conquest to Today

Presentation created by Lori Riehl, November 2008
Do Now

✓ Assume that the Maya moved into the jungles and villages surrounding former cities.
✓ What challenges might bring them back together as a society? What cultural connections might they still have? List 3-5 ideas.
The Spanish conquer the Aztecs

- What does “indigenous” mean?
- Spanish conquered Mexico’s Aztec rulers between 1519–1521

- Survival of “New Spain” depended on indigenous knowledge and labor: “Without the support from indigenous allies it is doubtful that Spain would have been successful in conquering Mexico.”*

- Spanish took on paternalistic (fatherly) and protective role with indigenous people

- Indigenous populations included Maya & Aztecs

- The Yucatan was not conquered until 1542**
The Maya in Mexico in the 20th century

✓ Mexican Revolution (1917) to 1970s
✓ In 1917, 62 languages were spoken in Mexico
✓ In 1950: 65% spoke Mayan; 2000: 37%*
✓ Today: some villages speak almost entirely in Maya dialects*
✓ 12 million indigenous people (11–12% of population)

✓ How are indigenous people treated by governments? Society?
Challenges faced by indigenous Maya

- Social exclusion
- Land struggles
- Poor health conditions
- Natural disasters
- Restricted political activity through civil rights abuses and military presence in Mayan regions
- Language discrimination (as recently as 2002 courts used Spanish and did not supply interpreters for non-Spanish speakers)
Indigenous Land Rights

- Indigenous people needed to retain their land
- Why is land ownership important?
- The Spaniards generally recognized the rights of the indigenous people to the land until 1940
Changes in Land Rights

- In 1940, the Autonomous Department of Indigenous Affairs formed to assimilate Indians into Mexican culture.
- The Mexican government began privatizing agricultural lands populated by Indians.
- What effects might this policy have on the Indians?
How did the Indians react?

- Indians called for mobilization and political participation
- Asked the government for
  - Land
  - Fair pay
  - Natural resources
  - Defense
  - Right to self-determination
The Zapatistas

- From the 1970s to the 1990s, government reforms continued to compromise Indian land rights.
- The Maya and other indigenous groups were represented by government agencies but progress to gain rights was slow.
- In 1994, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) formed in Chiapas to advocate for the rights of the Maya and other Indians in southeastern Mexico.
Zapatista resistance

- From the 1980s to the 1990s, several skirmishes occurred between the Zapatistas and the Mexican military—mostly in Chiapas
  - January 1994: Zapatista uprising in Chiapas included the assassinations of Mexican leaders
  - December 1997: Massacre of 45 indigenous peasants in Actael by the Mexican military
  - Several violent, deadly clashes between EZLN and the military along with armed civilian groups
Demands made by the Zapatistas in 1996

- Demands presented in the San Andrés Accords:
  - Regional autonomy and self-determination
  - Investments in social services for indigenous populations
  - Anti-discrimination legislation
  - Conservation of natural resources
  - Demilitarization and removal of military groups from Mayan regions
Peace reached

- In April 2001, the Mexican Congress passed the San Andrés Accords with revisions opposed by the EZLN.
- In 2003, Zapatista leader, subcomandante Marcos, announced that indigenous communities should take steps toward self-governance.
- Chiapas is one of the more autonomous states in Mexico; San Juan Chamula is an autonomous community within Chiapas.
Will the Zapatistas rebel again?

✓ Reasons for “Yes”
- Protests persist
- The Maya are concentrated in a few key areas
- The EZLN is highly organized and cohesive
- The new President, Felipe Calderón, won in a contested election and could change Fox’s policies

✓ Reasons for “No”
- Increased democratic stability in the region
- President Fox’s administration was committed to meeting indigenous demands
- Public support for indigenous peoples has increased
- Lack of serious conflicts in Guatemala

Will the Zapatistas rebel again?
Where are Maya descendants today?

- About 60% of Maya in Mexico live in Chiapas.
- Maya also live in the states of Quintana Roo, Campeche, and Yucatán among others.
- Principal Maya tribes are Maya, Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Chol, Tojolabal, Zoque, and Lacandón, each with its own language.
What Maya customs remain in Mexico?

- Hetzmek remains the Maya baptism
- Weddings: Offering of the Mu’ujul en Bacabché
- Thatched-roof huts
- Weaving and textiles
Why do the Maya move?

- Based on 2008 data from one city with many Maya descendents, people moved for...
  - economic reasons (74%)
  - the “adventure” (25%)
- “What’s amazing is that most [recent immigrants] maintain [a] sense of hope—that [the move] will improve life for their families.”*
Where do the Maya move today?

- 76% moved to another city in Mexico
- 24% moved to the United States
  - 64% to San Francisco; 25% to other California cities
  - In 2002, Mayan population in the Bay Area was estimated at 5,000*
- “People don’t come to the U.S. simply looking for work—they go where they know someone [who] has told them there is work.”*
Where do Maya immigrants work?

- Many Maya immigrate to the United States to work in:
  - Construction
  - Agriculture
  - Service industry
- Send money and bring job skills back to Mexico
Do Mayan cultural values transfer?

✓ “Depending on where they come from, a lot of the Mayan communities in southern Mexico bring their cultural norms and values with them.”

Renee Saucedo
San Francisco Day Labor Program
Today’s Exit Tickets

✓ A completed note-taking organizer
✓ Responses to three questions:

1. What does *indigenous* mean?
2. What is the main issue around which the indigenous Maya are politicized today?
3. What is one question you have about what you learned today?