

The Resistance



Illustration of the *Popul Vuh* by Diego Rivera

Remember us after we are gone. Don't forget us. Conjure up our faces and our words. Our image will be as a tear in the hearts of those who want to remember us.

~ Sacred Mayan Prayer, *Popul Vuh*

The invasion of this hemisphere was not a single event or a series of events of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The invasion and destruction have been constant for five hundred years. Christopher Columbus, Hernando Cortes, Francisco Pizarro, Pedro Alvarado, the Puritans, and other invaders instituted economic and political structures whose legacies still destroy land and people today.

Where once fleets of Spanish galleons transgressed seas loaded with armored soldiers carrying arquebuses and cannon, now U.S. Marines, rapid deployment forces, and CIA covert activities

trespass across borders in order to carry out the will of the powerful. Where once the settlers came with horses and dynamite ripping out trees for plantations and roads for gold mines, now multinationals come to the Amazon rainforest with bulldozers and dynamite to clear away ancient trees for huge livestock plantations and roads for gold miners. Where once French, English, and Spanish traders carried human beings into labor slavery, now multinational traders carry factories to Mexico and Central America, delivering workers into virtual wage slavery. Where once the invaders came with the *requerimiento* signed by Pope and King giving the native people an ultimatum: submit or be destroyed; now world lending institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank come armed with new requirements: submit your economic system to suit the world's dominant countries or you will receive no new loans and your ravished economies will be destroyed. These new requirements sound much like the old patterns of extracting wealth: institute lower wages, increase exports, import technology and expertise from Europe and the United States, and then pay back the loans at exorbitant rates of interest.

Christopher Columbus planted the first sugar cane, instituting both forced labor to work the huge plantations and an export-based economy that made huge profits for a few white Europeans. Today cane cutters in the Dominican Republic and coffee pickers in Central America receive starvation wages while a few wealthy landowners and huge multinational corporations control the land and reap the profits. All of this is the legacy of invasion.

The first invaders said they were bringing God and civilization. In fact, what they brought was feudalism, deadly microbes, slavery, and lust for wealth. Within five hundred years the invaders annihilated whole tribes, killed millions of Africans, destroyed communal lands, eradicated whole species of plant and animal life, and melted sacred art and religious symbols into bullion. They ripped open the veins of Latin America, extracting blood from its people and gold and silver from its mountains.

Yet if invasion has been constant, the resistance to that invasion has also been ceaseless. From the shores of Africa to the Caribbean islands, from the Andean mountains and Guatemalan highlands to the Western plains, people have refused to submit to injustice and have struggled to preserve their culture and dignity. At times it was individual resistance—a runaway slave, a refusal to name co-conspirators, a revival of an outlawed cultural ritual. At other times it was highly organized resistance involving tens of thousands of people, such as the struggle for the independence of Haiti, Pontiac's Confederacy, the Araucanian resistance, and the Mexican Revolution of 1910. More often than not, however, it was episodic and decentralized. Individuals or small bands of rebels decided to strike for freedom, or peasants organized to reclaim their land. From the first slave ships where Africans mutinied to capture the ship to tin miners striking in Bolivia and university students protesting in Mexico City, every generation since 1492 has resisted the invasion.

It would be impossible to document every act of resistance. For one thing, much of that record has been lost, since history is most often written by the conquerors. White Europeans have, for the most part, written the history of this hemisphere. The words of U.S. history texts used in

schools show the perspective. As one textbook summarizes: Columbus’s voyage in search of a western route to Asia ended the isolation of American cultures and brought two worlds together.” Those are clearly not the words of an indigenous survivor of the decimation wrought by the European invaders.

The selections in this chapter follow major periods or patterns of resistance:

African American Resistance



Nat Turner Rebellion

African resistance began in Africa, continued on board the slave ships, and then resumed upon touching the shore of the land the Europeans called America. The African American resistance communities formed in the inaccessible areas of this hemisphere by runaway slaves is a testament to the courage and ingenuity of men and women struggling for freedom at any cost. African American resistance has been constant and multi-leveled. American resistance has been constant and multi-leveled. The selections try to show that variety and tenacity, from the anonymous woman rebel on the slave ship “Robert” to the women of Montgomery, Alabama, who were the power behind the successful bus boycott that ignited the civil rights movement; from the Jamaican resistance leader Nanny to Malcolm X and Martin Luther King.

Indigenous Resistance, North and South

The indigenous population, after an initial welcome to the Europeans, began a defense of their lives and land that continues today. We have selected some of the more heroic and successful of those efforts, including the great Araucanian resistance that defeated the Spaniards for three hundred years, keeping their lands in what is now southern Chile from colonization. But even when the Sioux, Cheyenne, and Apache nations succumbed to military firepower, a spirit of resistance could not be extinguished. Eighty years after the supposed final battle of the “Indian Wars,” a new native militancy rose up at Wounded Knee, the very site of that last battle, successfully challenging white domination and igniting a new sense of dignity and honor among native peoples.

- In the Andean region that is now Peru and Bolivia, the eighteenth century was a time of upheaval marked by small and great rebellions. We introduce some of the leaders, including Juan Santos Atahualpa, Tupace Amaru II, and Micaela Bastidas.
- In the nineteenth century it was Mexico’s turn, as the country erupted in 142 recorded village riots and revolts involving *campesinos* demanding land and justice. These rebellions that first lead to Mexican independence in the early part of the nineteenth century culminated with the Mexican Revolution at the dawn of the twentieth.

Central American Resistance

In the Twentieth century our attention turns to Central America, where modern-day rebels taking the names of past heroes continued the struggle for land and justice. Throughout the Guatemalan highlands and Salvadoran mountains, communities of resistance continued the struggle that begun over five hundred years ago.

Resistance Today

One example among many is the struggle to save the rainforest of Brazil. All of the elements of the first invasion are being re-enacted there. Its final fate has become important to the whole world as scientists are realizing the sustaining effect that the world’s largest forest has on the ecosphere. Who wins that struggle may well determine the fate of the whole earth.

The selections that follow try to inspire hope; demonstrate that courage was not the sole domain of men or famous leaders; give voice to the anonymous bands of rebels whose names are lost to us, but whose deeds remain; and show that defeat of the rebels has never been final, but has only served to push history to the next state where resistance emerges once again.

Whatever measure of liberty or civil rights that we enjoy today was, in large part, won by these rebels.

We have certainly inherited the winds of destruction, but we are also free to claim the legacy of resistance. Untold people have been killed but multitudes have risen up to take their places.

Pre-Reading Strategies

American Revolutions and Resistance

Quickly brainstorm a list of events and people that come to mind when you think of revolution in the Americas. Discuss in a group or individually write about your present knowledge of resistance and revolution. Review what you learned in school about revolutionaries in the United States, in Latin America, and among “minorities” on this continent. Or you might sketch a timeline to indicate any revolutions or rebellions you can remember and when they happened.

The Three R’s: Resistance, Revolt and Revolution

Consider why it is that individuals or groups “resist.” Brainstorm occasions when you or your group would resist. Consider the following questions?

What would be your rationale for resisting?

How would you go about planning your resistance?

What form would your resistance take?

What might be some differences, if any, between resistance and spontaneous revolts?

What is the connection between revolt and revolution?

African American Resisters

The introduction to this section of the book which follows, states, “The invasion of this hemisphere was not a single event or a series of events of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. The invasion and destruction has been constant for over five hundred years.” So has been the history of resistance by indigenous people of the Americas and African Americans who were forcibly transported to these shores.

Although they have not been portrayed prominently in traditional history, African Americans have nonetheless played a significant role throughout the history of the Americas. Below are names mentioned in this part of the book. Review the names and list as many facts about each person or group that you have learned from conventional history. Some names may be new to

you. After completing the reading of this section of the book, return to this exercise and review the names again, listing facts for each. After doing this exercise, reflect on/discuss the following:

How many of these individuals appear in traditional textbooks?

How is your understanding of history altered when you read about people such as these who have been significant in resistance and yet have never been recognized for their involvement in history?

Why may many of us not have heard of these significant persons in American history?

Joseph Cinque	Toussaint L'Ouverture	François Macandal
Jean-Jacques Dessalines	Mary Church Terrell	Maroons
Frederick Douglas	Tomba	Madison Washington
W.E.D. DuBois	Nathaniel Turner	Ida B. Wells
Henry Highland Garnet	Denmark Vesey	

Parallel Timelines

As you read through this entire chapter, develop parallel chronologies of resistance in different parts of the Americas (African American and Caribbean resistance, indigenous resistance throughout the Americas, and the more recent Central American/Mexican resistance). Against these three parallel timelines develop a fourth timeline of the events and periods of American history typically covered in American history classes. Use these timelines to organize your awareness of movements and issues in American history and world history.

African American Resistance

Early Resistance



“The Hunted Slaves,” engraved by C. G. Lewis (1865)

One of the most common forms of slave resistance was running away. Here fugitive slaves defend themselves against dogs specially trained by professional slave catchers.

~ Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University

The Shores of Africa, 1500s: The Forerunners

It began at the edge of our homeland where the verdant forests and tropical bush gave way gradually to the sandy beaches of the Guinea coast. It began at the mouths of rivers, from the northern point where the Senegal and the Gambia pour their troubled streams into the waters around Cape Verde, down the thousands of miles of coastline to the place where the mighty river Congo breaks out into the ocean. On these shores near the mouths of these rivers, we first saw the ships.

There was no way to know it then, but their crews of men and boys came from many ports to find the shores of Africa. They sailed from Amsterdam and Lisbon, from Nantes and La Rochelle, from Bristol and London, from Newport and Boston on ships with strange names. They came to us on “Brotherhood” and “John the Baptist,” on “Justice: and “integrity,” on “Gift of God” and “Liberty”; they came on the good ship “Jesu.” But by the time our weary lines of chained and mourning travelers saw the vessels riding on the coastal waves, there could be but one

meaning: captivity. Thus it was on the edge of our continent—where some of us gulped down handfuls of sand in a last effort to hold the reality of the land—that the long struggle for black freedom began.

~ Vincent Harding, *There is a River*, 3

Before the Mayflower

In the sixteenth century, while Spaniards were just beginning the mass trading of human beings, an advanced civilization was developing in Africa. For example, Benin City, in the interior, was a center of art and commerce. The city stretched for twenty-five miles; wide boulevards were lined with sizable houses sporting balustrades and verandas. Travel was not unknown; increasing archeological evidence, including skeletons and carvings, points to the fact that Africans traveled to what is now Central and Latin America several times, centuries before Columbus. Not only slaves but also free Africans arrived in the Western Hemisphere long before the first permanent English colony at Jamestown in 1620.

Position as Slaves

Africans were the only group to come to this hemisphere as slaves, and from the very beginning, African and African American resistance was a constant. Because of the nature of the slave institution, that resistance had to take a variety of forms, many of them disguised. To the whites what seemed like laziness or stupidity was often really a work slowdown or a pretending not to understand in order to deprive the slave owners of labor.

Sabotage, work slowdowns, organized strikes, running away, fires destroying plantations, mutinies on slave ships, ground glass in the master's food poisonings, feigning sickness or pregnancy, insurrections plotted or carried out—all were acts of resistance perpetrated by slaves for the sake of freedom. Even suicide was an act of rebellion, a way of depriving the white man of his "property." Some slaves also believed that death would take them back to Africa. The resistance of Africans to the dehumanization of chains and the middle passage was so great that some tried to starve themselves. Their captors devised tortures, including hot coals to the lips and a special instrument that wrenched open the jaws of the resisters just to feed them. In many cases, even that did not work.

Historian Herbert Aptheker found 250 instances of revolts and conspiracies in the history of North American slavery; in Brazil, Suriname, and Jamaica, slave rebellion was a way of life.

~ See Eugene Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution*

Hispaniola, 1522: First Slave Rebellion

We cannot forget that America was built on Africa...America became, through African labor, the center of the sugar empire and the cotton kingdom and an integral part of that world industry which caused the industrial revolution and the reign of capitalism....

~ W.E.B. Dubois, quoted in Milton Meltzer, *Slavery II*, 127

It takes only one generation. Columbus brought the first cane plant to Hispaniola on his second voyage. Two decades later his Diego is reaping sugar and revolt. This “white gold” savagely devours the fertility of the land and the flesh of the indigenous population. Africans brought to work the land in place of the Arawaks prefer to die in the fire of revolt. Diego sees his plantation and fields burning. When the Spaniards finally stop the revolt, they hand the rebels along the road to stop future uprisings.

It doesn't work.

~ See Eduardo Galeano, *Memories of Fire: Genesis*, 72-73

Sierra Leone, 1721: Black Women in the Struggle

...in spite of constant and costly defeats, the struggles for freedom went on. Often women took a crucial part, making full use of the special status and greater freedom of movement accorded them. Their role was exemplified in the events on board the English ship “Robert” as it stood off the coast of Sierra Leone in 1721. Among the thirty captives on board was a man who called himself Captain Tomba, one of the earliest identifiable leaders of the struggle. He and several other African men and an unnamed woman had developed a plan to attack the crew, overcome them, and make their way back to the shore. The woman, because she had greater freedom of movement, was chosen to inform the men of the best time for the attack.

One night as she roamed the deck, she noted that the number of sailors in the night watch was small enough to make a surprise move more feasible. After she managed to inform Tomba, he prepared to act immediately; but only one of the African men who had promised earlier to assist him was not ready to join Tomba and the woman. Nevertheless, these three decided to strike for their freedom. The smallness of their force and an accidental sounding of an alarm worked against them, so that after killing two of the crew they were overwhelmed by others, beaten to the deck and placed in chains....

And what of the black woman who chose the struggle for black freedom over her privileged



bondage among white men? We are told that “the woman he hoisted up by the Thumbs, whipp’d and slashed her with Knives before the other slaves till she died.” And so, not far from the shores of her homeland, the swaying bleeding body of a sister in struggle bore terrifying witness to the cost of the decision for freedom. Yet perhaps she would have considered this lonely vigil above the sea a better use of her body than any that the crew members had had in mind.

~ Vincent Harding, *There is a River*, 12-13

The cost of rebellion on slave ships was often being thrown overboard. Sharks followed many slave ships, a testament to the constancy of rebellion.

Maroon Resistance

Maroons: Communities of Resisters

In 1502, Governor Ovando brought “a few Negroes” to Hispaniola to bolster the faltering colony that Columbus had left behind. Among them was the first African American maroon, who escaped to the Indians soon after coming ashore.

Maroonage or flight was one of the major ways slaves resisted their cruel conditions. It was so common that communities formed by these runaways filled the edges of the Americas from North Carolina to Brazil. Known as *palenques*, *quilombos*, *mocambos*, *cumbes*, *laderas* or *mambises*, these new societies embraced African values and traditions while utilizing the skills of the indigenous population. Some survived less than a year, while others lasted for generations or even centuries.

Some became so powerful and so threatening to the plantation system both militarily and economically that the whites had to press for peace agreements with them. The first treaties made by Europeans in the Western Hemisphere were with the maroons.

Almost constantly at war with the Europeans, the maroon communities had to be nearly inaccessible in order to survive because their former masters usually hunted for them. They had to find land both defensible and hidden, which meant creating a society in the most inhospitable terrain. This required immense creativity and courage to endure daily

hardships. For example, in one maroon community the water was filled with worms; the people had to devise elaborate purifying operations just to live there.

Yet amid the brambles or rocks or dense jungles, these maroons created thriving economies that included a wide variety of foods and art and a well-developed political and military organization. Maroon societies raised manioc, yams, beans, bananas and plantains, sugarcane, vegetables, tobacco, and cotton. Through ingenious traps and springs they were able to capture animals and fish.

Maroons throughout the Americas developed incredible skills in guerrilla warfare. The defense of their societies included booby traps, false paths with pointed spikes, and extensive use of the natural environment for defense. The warrior bands became adept at ambush, surprise, cross fires, and extreme mobility. They developed extensive and reliable intelligence networks and often communicated by horns. These tactics were necessary because they were almost always outnumbered, and the Europeans had superior firepower.

The reality of resistance, so integral to the Caribbean, was rooted in the slave's consciousness of his or her human dignity.

~ See Richard Price, ed., *Maroon Societies* and Mavis C. Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica 1655-1796*

San Domingo, 1700s: Ad for Runaways

Zabo, an Ibo, five feet one, quite homely, has scars and lash marks on shoulders having only recently been whipped. Fled the home of the undersigned. Seven newly arrived slaves, part of the cargo of the vessel "L'Aimable," all Congos, not yet branded.

~ Jean Fouchar, *The Haitian Maroons: Liberty or Death*, 4

Surinam, 1718: Permanent Resistance

The fact that punishments for runaways have to be codified into edicts and laws testifies to the persistence of the maroon resistance.

If a slave runs away into the forest in order to avoid work for a few weeks, upon his being captured his Achilles tendon is removed for the first offence, while for a second offence...his

right leg is amputated in order to stop his running away; I myself was a witness to slaves being punished in this way.

~ Richard Price, ed., *Maroon Societies*, 3

Palmares, Brazil, 1695: Maroon Community

For ninety years, maroons have sustained an African society called Palmares led by a small group of chiefs. Economically successful, they have developed trading relations with local plantation owners. Living in a constant state of war, they spread themselves over a large area and engage in general guerrilla war, gradually wearing down the Portuguese. Recognizing the constant threat of the inspiration of their example to other slaves, the Portuguese inflict heavy losses on the Palmarinos, whose supreme chief, *ganga-zumba*, sues for peace in 1678. But the younger leaders, including the *zumbi* (war chief), resume the struggle. Not until 1695 do the Portuguese develop a powerful coalition, including ruffians and mercenaries, to defeat the Palmarinos. The Portuguese describe the *zumbi* as a *Negro of singular courage, great spirit and persistence.*

~ Eugene Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution*, 63

Surinam, 1796: An Adversary Speaks

Captain Stedman, an enemy of the maroons who overran some of their villages is impressed with the life they have created under the harshest conditions...*Their fields are even overstocked with rice, cassava, yams, plantains, etc. They make salt from palm-tree ashes...We have found concealed near the trunk of an old tree a case-bottle filled with excellent butter, which...they made by melting and clarifying the fat of the palm-tree worms; this fully answers all the purposes of European butter, and I found it in fact even more delicious to my taste.*

The pistachio or panda nuts (peanuts) also convert into butter...and frequently use them in their broths. The palm-tree wine they always have in plenty...They fabricate pots from clay...the gourd or callebasse tree procures them cups; the silk-grass plant...supplies materials for their hammocks...candles they can make, having plenty of fat and oil; and the wild bees afford them wax, as well as excellent honey.

~ Richard Price, ed., *Maroon Societies*, 11

Jamaica, 1730: Nanny, Freedom Fighter

Legend and folklore, they say, embody the spirit of the people who remember and tell the stories. The name and deeds of Nanny still dance on the lips of twentieth-century Jamaicans. Her town is still sacred ground.

Leader of the Windward Maroons, she is so powerful they name a town after her, which becomes known for having the greatest warriors. Completely naked except for a necklace of teeth, she invokes loa Ogun (Yoruba god of war) before going into battle. Her followers believe she has magic powers that will make them invulnerable to English weapons. They swear oaths of allegiance to the cause of repelling the intruders from their land. It will take all the magic they can muster to defeat the lust for wealth propelling the white man to this small island.

In battle, Nanny catches British bullets in her buttocks and expels them back. She keeps a large cauldron bubbling without a fire. When the British soldiers come too close they fall in and suffocate.

Nanny is full of magic. The white men's teeth she wears around her neck cannot bite her.

~ Mavis C. Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica 1655-1796*, 4, 11, 50, 51



The San Domingo Revolution

San Domingo, 1758: The Precursors

The Colonial Mentality:

"I want an egg," says the white colonial child.

"There are no eggs."

"Then I want two."

~ C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, 29

The maroon named François Macandal has only one hand, the other sacrificed to a sugar mill and slavery. One day he runs away and becomes the leader of escaped slaves in the mountains, known for poisonings that spread terror throughout the country. He dislikes the pillaging of mansions and the stealing of herds. He wants to make maroonage the

center of an organized resistance against the whites in order to free the slaves. He says if the whites catch him and try to burn him, he will become a fly and escape the fire.

He is finally captured and sentenced to death at the stake. Today he is to be burned. A number of slave masters die from poison, thanks to cooks who are his allies. As the flames rise around him, miraculously the iron rings holding him fall from the wood and he is free. Many believe his prophecy is coming true. The whites capture him again and turn him to ash.

~ See Jean Fouchard, *The Haitian Maroons*, 317-321

Slaves Free Themselves

The black-led revolution in San Domingo not only freed the slaves and established a modern state, Haiti, it sent hope to slaves throughout the Western Hemisphere.

It was a brilliant diplomatic and military victory led by Toussaint L'Ouverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines! What started as thousands of untrained slaves ended up a disciplined army that defeated the greatest military forces of the day, including the Spanish, the English, and the French under Napoleon.

The San Domingo revolution occurred in the context of the French revolution, as the cries for freedom and equality were heard on both sides of the Atlantic.

San Domingo was ripe for revolution because of its decades of successful maroon escapes and warfare. There had been a tradition of freedom. The blacks also significantly outnumbered the whites; as late as 1790, forty thousand new Africans were being imported. Those fresh from Africa were more likely to join the revolt since freedom was still in their hearts. When the slaves heard the French peasants cry for liberty and equality, they made that cry their own.

The following chronology puts the San Domingo revolution in perspective.

Chronology

July 14, 1788:

- French peasants storm the Bastille; the French Revolution begins under the banner of "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity."

1791:

- Boukman begins the slave revolt.

1792:

- Toussaint begins training a few hundred troops.
- Six thousand French troops sail for San Domingo to put down the slave revolt.
- Paris masses storm the Tulleries, imprison the royal family, dissolve the legislature, and call for the abolition of slavery. For the first time, the black of San Domingo have allies in France.
- Laveaux, the French commander, defeats Toussaint.

1793:

- The king of France is executed; the revolutionary armies are winning successes.
- Toussaint issues his call for blacks to unite.

1794:

- Britain sets its sights on San Domingo and other Caribbean islands. The British want to re-establish slavery and make them colonies. One of the leaders of this colonization move says in Parliament that the war in the West Indies was "...not for riches or local aggrandizement but a war for security...." The property owners of San Domingo (even though they are French) rush to welcome the British because they prefer their slaves to the goals of the revolution.
- Toussaint, a Spanish officer now and ally of the British, has been defeating the French. Seeing the wave of British victories in the Caribbean, he weighs the future carefully.

Historian C.L. R. James writes: "It was a crucial moment in history. If the British could hold San Domingo, the finest colony in the world, they would once more be a power in American waters. Instead of being abolitionists, they would be the most powerful practitioners of the slave trade....If the British completed the conquest of San Domingo, the colonial empire of revolutionary France was gone; its vast resources would be directed into British pockets, and Britain would be able to return to Europe and throw army and navy against the revolution" (James, 136).

- At the French Convention, a member rises to speak: "Since 1789 the aristocracy of birth and the aristocracy of religion have been destroyed; but the aristocracy of the skin still remains. A black man, a yellow man, and a white are about to join this convention in the name of the free citizens of San Domingo." There is an outburst of applause. The National Convention abolishes slavery in the colonies. (James, 139-140)
- Toussaint receives the news of the decree just as the fate of the French sits precariously before the might of the British. Toussaint does not hesitate. He decides to join the

French. Laveaux, the French commander, is overjoyed and makes him a Brigadier General. Immediately he undertakes a campaign to retake for the French the cities that he had just a while before captured for the Spanish.

1795:

- Toussaint's power grows. To the people, his word is law. He is as much concerned about winning victories over the British as creating a prosperous society. Trying to rein in the chaos of war, he proclaims, "Work is necessary, it is a virtue, it is for the general good of the state." He orders workers to begin planting twenty-four hours after a territory is liberated by his army. He institutes a conciliatory policy towards whites because he knows their skill, education, and experience are needed by the colony in order to prosper.

1796:

- At the end of the year, after three years of war, the British have lost eight thousand men, half of them dead. It has cost them millions of pounds.
- Toussaint combines military superiority with astute propaganda and wins seven victories in seven days.
- The British ask for a truce.
- Toussaint forbids pillage by his soldiers and so, starving and half-naked, they maintain their discipline. No single act of violence happens.
- Toussaint's entry into Port Républicain is a triumph. Black laborers and ex-slaves come out to hail ex-slaves who have become soldiers and have defeated one of the strongest nations on earth. Even the whites call Toussaint their liberator. An arch of triumph is quickly erected and some of the richest planters, who at one time were his staunchest enemies, invite Toussaint to mount the dais. Toussaint replies, "A dais and incense belong only to God."
- The French send General Hédouville to govern San Domingo. Inept and troublesome, he threatens to have French forces return. Toussaint marches to Le Cap and chases Hédouville from the island. Toussaint addresses the citizens who welcome him: "Hédouville says that I am against liberty...Who ought to love liberty more, Toussaint L'Ouverture, slave of Breda, or General Hédouville, former Marquis and Chevalier de Saint-Louis?"

Historian C.L.R. James comments: *At bottom the popular movement had acquired an immense self-confidence. The former slaves had defeated white colonists, Spaniards, and British, and now*

they were free....Black men who had been slaves were deputies in the French Parliament, black men who had been slaves negotiated with the French and foreign governments. Black men who had been slaves filled the highest positions in the colony. There was Toussaint, the former slave, incredibly grand and powerful and incomparably the greatest man in San Domingo. There was no need of being ashamed of being a black....The revolution had awakened them, had given them the possibility of achievement, confidence, and pride. The psychological weakness, that feeling of inferiority with which the imperials poison colonial people everywhere, these was gone... (James, 244).

1797:

- The forces of reaction and counter-revolution are gaining in France. The French leaders suspect Toussaint of wanting complete freedom, Toussaint suspects them of wanting to restore slavery.

1800:

- Toussaint marches on Spanish San Domingo and routs the Spanish troops; the Spanish formally hand over the colony.
- Toussaint writes to Napoleon Bonaparte in France telling him that he has relieved the French agent of his duties. Toussaint is laying the ground-work for an independent nation. But, according to C.L.R. James, he makes a fatal mistake, his only one in years of battle and maneuvers:

His error was to neglect of his own people. They did not understand what he was doing or where he was going. He took no trouble to explain. It was dangerous to explain, but still more dangerous not to explain. His temperament, close and self-contained, was one that kept its own counsel. Thus, the masses thought that he had taken Spanish San Domingo to stop the slave traffic, and not as a safeguard against the French... (James, 240)

- Toussaint sets out to govern the colony under a military dictatorship--albeit a benevolent one. He is still under the French command. He advocates racial equality, hard work, high morality, and public education. Race prejudice, the curse of San Domingo for two hundred years, is vanishing. In a year and a half Toussaint restores cultivation to two-thirds what it was at San Domingo's height. And this is a country devastated by war. He builds schools, roads, theaters. He sends black and mulatto children to school in Europe so that they can return to govern. All he wants is time. Visitors remark that there is a new spirit in the land.
- Toussaint sends many letters to Napoleon asking for teachers and technicians to rebuild the colony. Napoleon never answers. Toussaint knows that he and his people are safe as

long as the British and the French are fighting each other. One day the war will end, and San Domingo will once again have to fight for its freedom.

- San Domingo does not have peace. The white colonists cause trouble, while the maritime bourgeoisie in France, the ones who profit so much from trade in human beings, are gaining power. In addition, Napoleon hates blacks.

1801:

- England signs the peace treaty with France. Napoleon sends twenty thousand troops to San Domingo under the command of General LeClerc, the largest force ever to leave France. Their purpose--to reinstitute slavery.

1802:

- Even though he is holding a strong position, Toussaint sues for peace. The terms are that all of the black soldiers and officers maintain their rank. He wants to maintain the army and end the destruction. LeClerc happily agrees.
- Toussaint retires to his plantation.
- Tricked into coming to Le Cap, Toussaint is arrested, bound, and sent to France.
- Toussaint dies in prison.
- Forces led by Jean Jacques Dessalines defeat the French.
- Declaration of Independence is read. The new state is renamed Haiti.
- Dessalines is crowned.

1805:

- Dessalines orders all whites massacred.

C.L.R. James writes: *The massacre of the whites was a tragedy; not for the whites. For these old slave-owners, those who burnt a little powder in the arse of a Negro, who buried him alive for insects to eat, who were well treated by Toussaint, and who, as soon as they got the chance, began their old cruelties again; for those there is no need to waste one tear or one drop of ink.*

The tragedy was for the blacks and the mulattoes. It was not policy but revenge, and revenge has no place in politics. The whites were no longer to be feared, and such purposeless massacres degrade and brutalise a population, especially one which was just beginning as a nation and

had had so bitter a past. The people did not want it--all they wanted was freedom, and independence seemed to promise that (James, 373, 374)

San Domingo, 1788: The Colonial Reality

In San Domingo there are big whites and small whites. The big whites are the planters and large merchants. The clerks, artisans, grocers, vagabond, debtors, thieves are the small whites. No white is a servant, no white does work if he can get a black person to do it for him. Skin color and racial prejudice are the fundamental principles of the society.

A man calls for the barber. The barber arrives dressed in silk with cane and sword followed by four slaves. One slave combs the hair, another curls it, the third dresses it, and the fourth cleans up. One isn't fast enough and the barber smacks him, knocking him down. When they are done they leave, following the white barber, who is walking out like an aristocrat.

The slaves do everything—except receive the money.

~ See C.L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, 33

San Domingo, 1790: Arithmetic of Racism

François is the son of a white man and a mulatto. He is a *quarteroon*, 96 parts white and 32 parts black.

Marie is also a *quarteroon* produced by a white and a marabou in the proportion of 88 to 40; her half-sister is the product of a white and a *sacatra* in the proportion of 72 to 56.

Christophe is a *sang-mele* with 127 parts white to 1 part black. In the arithmetic of racism, he is still a man of color, not entitled to the privilege of whites.

~ C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, 38

San Domingo, 1791: The Beginning

It is becoming a long hot summer. While the rich white planters enjoy cold drinks on the veranda, drums are beating in the hills. They are worshipping their tribal gods, say the whites. How primitive and simple-minded, say the whites.

In the hills, a tall man stands behind a make-shift altar. Speaking in a deep penetrating voice, he tells the assembled slaves that it is time to revolt. It is time to avenge the wrongs, it is time to gain freedom. The man's name is Boukman.

Eight days later, on August 22 at midnight, one hundred thousand slaves begin a movement that will break their chains and found a nation. In a moment, twelve hundred coffee and two hundred sugar plantations are in flames....*the whole horizon a wall of flames...Such was their voracity that for three weeks we could barely distinguish between day and night...*

~ Lerone Bennett Jr., *Before the Mayflower*, 113-115

San Domingo, 1791: Ideas Can Make History

A priest named Abbe Raynal wrote a book, famous in this time, calling for a slave revolution. He wrote:

Natural liberty is the right which nature has given to everyone to dispose of himself according to his will....These are memorable and eternal truths—the foundation of all morality, the basis of all government; will they be contested? Yes!...A courageous chief only is wanted. Where is he, that great man whom Nature owes to her vexed, oppressed, and tormented children? Where is he? He will appear, doubt it not; he will come forth and raise the sacred standard of liberty.

The man holding the book has read those lines many times. *A courageous chief only is wanted.* Who is he? The man reading those lines is forty-five years old, a carriage driver, steward of livestock, and a slave. Already his hair is turning grey.

It is always the blacks who suffer the most, is a phrase he often says. His name—Toussaint Breda, soon to be known to the world as Toussaint L'Ouverture.

~ C.L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, 25

San Domingo, 1793: The Opening

On August 29, Toussaint Breda makes this call to all slaves:

Brothers and friends. I am Toussaint L'Ouverture. My name is perhaps known to you. I have undertaken vengeance. I want Liberty and Equality to reign in San Domingo. I work to bring them into existence. Unite yourselves to us, brothers, and fight with us for the same cause....

*Your very humble and very obedient servant,
(signed) Toussaint L'Ouverture*

At the news of another victory by Toussaint, the French say, "This man makes an opening everywhere." "L'Ouverture" means opening.

~ C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, 125

Toussaint L'Ouverture

San Domingo, 1797: Declaration of Liberty

You think me a fanatic, for you read history with your prejudices. But fifty years hence, when Truth gets a hearing, the Muse of history will put Phocion for the Greek, Brutus for the Roman, Hampden for the English, Lafayette for France: choose Washington as the bright, consummate flower of our earliest civilization; and then, dipping her pen in the sunlight, will write in the clear blue, above them all, the name of the soldier, the statesman, the martyr, Toussaint L'Ouverture.



~ Wendell Phillips, Quoted in Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower*, 117

Toussaint, not six years out of slavery, dictates a letter to his secretary to be sent to the French Director. Working from his broken dialect, the secretaries shape Toussaint's eloquent ideas into beautiful prose. Fearing that a movement is underway by some in France to restore slavery, he writes:

Do they think that men have been able to enjoy the blessing of liberty will calmly see it snatched away? They supported their chains only so long as they did not know any condition of life more happy than that of slavery. But today when they have left it, if they had a thousand lives they would sacrifice them all rather than be forced into slavery again....

But if, to re-establish slavery in San Domingo, this was done, then I declare to you it would be to attempt the impossible: we have known how to face dangers to obtain our liberty, we shall know how to brave death to maintain it. (Toussaint's emphasis)

~ C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, 196-197

San Domingo, 1800: Toussaint, the Man

In his room there are always flowers. He loves music and children.

One day while he is riding in the countryside, a ten-year old orphan named Rose stops him crying, *Papa, Papa, take me away with you*. He dismounts, takes her in his arms and carries her home. He hands her to his wife Suzanne and says, *Here is an orphan who has just called me father. I have accepted the title. Accept also the title of her mother*.

In battle he is one with his men. If a cannon needs to be moved, his shoulder is also at the wheel. Wherever the battle is most intense, there he is in the front. Escaping death many times, he seems to lead a charmed life. Once the plume on his hat is shoot off. On another occasion his carriage is riddled. Horses are shot from under him and those next to him are killed. In ten years he is wounded seventeen times.

He governs with the same energy that carried him through years of war. He sleeps only two hours every night. For days he is satisfied with two bananas and a glass of water. He has hundreds of throughout horses scattered throughout the countryside. It is typical for him to ride 125 miles a day.

When he is fighting, it seems to the enemy that he is everywhere, especially where they least expect him. His ability to move troops faster and farther than what seems humanly possible is a main reason for his astounding victories. When governing, he appears out of nowhere to inspect or administer or pass out awards. Then he rides back to his office to dictate hundreds of letters.

He dictates to five secretaries at once.

~ See C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, 249-250, 255

San Domingo, 1801: Black Consul

He seems to know exactly what to say to people.

When the black laborers come to him, nervous about white domination returning, Toussaint takes a jar filled with black corn and then puts in a few pieces of white corn.

You are the black maize; the whites who would enslave you are the white maize. Then he shakes the jar. The laborers leave satisfied.

Other black laborers come to him because the whites and mulattoes have been spreading insults and treating them unjustly. They no longer want to obey the whites. Toussaint takes a glass of wine and a glass of water and mixes them.

Can you tell which is which? He asks. *We must all live together. They go away satisfied.*

~ See C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, 251-252

San Domingo, 1801: Toussaint Prepares for More War

Toussaint proclaims:

I took up arms for the freedom of my color, which France alone proclaimed, but she has not right to nullify. Our liberty is no longer in her hands: it is in our own. We will defend it or perish.

Toussaint addresses the army:

You are going to fight against men who have neither faith, law, nor religion. They promise you liberty, they intend your servitude. Why have so many ships traversed the ocean, if not to throw you back into chains?...Uncover your breasts, you will see them branded by the iron of slavery.

He takes a weapon from a soldier's hand and raises it into the air.

Here is your liberty!

~ C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, 226, 281, 307

San Domingo, 1801: The War for Independence

If it was Toussaint L'Ouverture who brought the colony to freedom, it is Jean-Jacques Dessalines who will make it an independent nation. Carrying the scars of slavery, Dessalines is relentless:

Take courage, I tell you, take courage. The French will not be able to remain long in San Domingo. They will do well at first, but soon they will fall ill and die like flies. Listen! If Dessalines surrenders to them a hundred times he will deceive them a hundred times....They will not be able to guard the country and they will have to leave. Then I shall make you independent.

For the first time in the French colony of San Domingo, a black leader speaks the word— independence.

~ C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, 314

San Domingo, 1802: Betrayal

French General Brunet writes a flowery letter to Toussaint asking him to come to headquarters for an interview. The general gives his personal assurances of good faith and safety.

It is eight in the evening and Toussaint and General Brunet are talking. Brunet begs to be excused for a moment. Immediately grenadiers with fixed bayonets enter the room. Toussaint rises and draws his sword. Assured that they only want to secure his person, he submits.

They bind him, arrest his son and wife, steal his money and personal papers. They rush him and his family on board a frigate bound for France.

As he steps on the boat, he says to the captain: *In overthrowing me, you have cut down in San Domingo only the trunk of the tree of liberty. It will spring up again by the roots that are too numerous and deep.*

~ C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, 333-334

Paris, 1802: Reading Between the Lines

Napoleon carefully reads the letter from General LeClerc. Four-fifths of the army has died from illness. A general insurrection has broken out in the North. The people know of the plan to reinstitute slavery.

...Fifty prisoners have been hung, these men die with an incredible fanaticism; they laugh at death; it is the same with the women....It is not enough to have taken away Toussaint, there are two thousand leaders to be taken away.

~ C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, 345-346

Fort-de-Joux, France, 1803: One End, One Beginning

He is shivering in this cell in the Jura Mountains. The walls drip with moisture, the logs counted so as never to bring real warmth. He collapses every so often into a coma. It is April 7. The guards enter and find Toussaint L'Ouverture sitting in his chair. He is dead.

Napoleon now believes the war is half won.

Across the ocean, in the hills of San Domingo, the former slaves do not know Toussaint has died. They are busy drawing up their declaration of independence.

~ C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, 365

San Domingo, 1803: They Advance Singing

Toussaint L'Ouverture told how the French would meet their fate: "Their bones will be scattered among the mountains and rocks and tossed about by the waves of the sea. Never more will they behold their native land...and liberty will reign over their tomb."

~ Quoted in C.L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, 307-308

It is November 16. The blacks and mulattoes are concentrating for a final assault on the heavily fortified Le Cap and its surrounding posts.

That afternoon, Capois Death, a black officer, leads the charge through a withering crossfire of muskets and artillery.

Forward, forward!

The French drive them back. Capois's horse is killed from under him. He stands up, gestures contempt to the French, and walks ahead crying, *Forward, forward.*

A French soldier, a staunch believer in slavery, would write fifty years later:

But what men these blacks are! How they fight and how they die! One has to make war against them to know their reckless courage in braving danger when they can no longer have recourse to stratagem....The more they fell, the greater seemed the courage of the rest. They advanced singing....

~ C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, 367-368

The United States

Slave Revolts

In addition to the direct evidence for a large number of slave revolts in the United States is the indirect evidence found in the white man's laws that legalized branding, flogging, burning, the amputation of limbs, hamstringing, other gruesome tortures, and death to punish resistance.

Massive successful revolts did not happen in the United States the way they did in Latin America and the Caribbean, Jamaica, Surinam, and Brazil, especially in the area of Bahia, had constant rebellion.

Historian Eugene Genovese has enumerated some of the reasons for the differences. It was not that slavery was somehow more humane in the United States, or that the slaves liked their oppression there. The difference lies rather in the conditions surrounding the plantations—the terrain, the ration of whites to slaves, etc.

Genovese's analysis suggests that if certain conditions were present there was a higher probability of a slave revolt:

- absenteeism and depersonalization in the master-slave relationship;
- economic distress and famine;
- a large concentration of slaves;
- splits in the ruling class;
- blacks heavily outnumbering whites;
- African-born slaves outnumbering native-born ones (Creoles);
- a slave-holding structure that allowed the emergence of an autonomous black leadership; and
- a geographical, social and political environment providing the terrain and opportunity for maroon communities that could last long enough to threaten the plantation culture (Genovese, 11-12).

South Carolina, 1526: First Slave Revolt

The first settlement within the present borders of the United States sees the first slave revolt. About five hundred Spaniards bring with them one hundred African slaves. The slaves' revolt and the Spaniards are so discouraged and beaten that they return to Haiti, leaving the Africans living with the indigenous populations, the first of several black and native acts of solidarity.

Maryland, 1664: Legal Repression

Things are getting bad from the viewpoint of the white planters. The white women are out of control. They refuse to accept white supremacy. They are not only associating with but they are marrying black men! Racism as a system does not yet exist, so the powerful rely on the only other thing besides weapons available to them—the law.

And as much as divers freeborn English women, forgetful of their free condition, and to the disgrace of our nation, do intermarry with Negro slaves...or deterring such free-born women from such shameful matches, be it enacted: That whatsoever free-born woman shall intermarry with any slave, from and after the last day of the present assembly, shall serve the master of that slave during the life of her husband; and that all the issue of such free-born women, so married, shall be slaves as their fathers were.

It does not work. White women defy the law, brave lifetime servitude for themselves and slavery for their children in order to marry the men they love. The mingling of the races continue in Maryland and other colonies where similar laws are established.

~ Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower*, 301

Stono, South Carolina, 1739: “Liberty”

In a small town twenty miles from Charleston, a group of enslaved Africans meet together and plot their freedom. With their leader, Jemmy, they break into a weapons storehouse and finally gather about seventy to eighty others. Their aim is to march to the Spanish colony of Florida. They march in the open with two drums beating and shouts of “Liberty” piercing the air. For that moment they are no longer slaves, no longer objects of servitude but men—soldiers of liberty. Their step, their voices, their courage all show it.

~ Vincent Harding, *The Other American Revolution*, 13-14

New York City, 1741: A Mob Attacks

Quaco and Cuffee, two slaves, are tied to the stake, the dry kindling reaching up to their knees. The white mob yells and presses close to them. The two confess to being part of a conspiracy to set fire to the white man’s fort.

The whites are hysterical. Deep down they know that the oppression of the slave only makes the fever for freedom grow hotter. The conspirators decided on their strategy a little over a

month ago, on a Sunday afternoon, over a bowl of punch. Forty or fifty of them were involved with plans to include other country people and blacks.

The mob presses closer, screaming, the authorities take their last opportunity to get them to name the other conspirators. They dangle life before the slaves like a carrot. Quaco and Cuffee refuse to name the others. They are burned alive.

Thirteen other African Americans are executed on the gallows; one is starved to death in chains, another broken on the wheel. Four whites were also involved. They, too, are executed. Two are women.

The whites carry out the torturous deaths to bring terror to the black and white community. Many slaves are still not cowed.

Years later, a young black boy enters a Louisiana town. On the post by the road are nailed two black hands. They are the hands of a rebel, recently hung on the gibbet. Some pass by in terror. They cower and step back from the line, obedient and silent. For them those black hands mean "stop." Others pass by and remember the rebellion, its cause and courage. For them the hands beckon them forward. They step over the line and join the struggle. The whites intended those hands to intimidate and silence, but in the memory of the defiant and those who want to be, those two black hands become dangerous.

~ Gary Nash, *Red, White and Black*, 124; Herbert Aptheker, ed., *Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, 4-5, 31, 36

Pennsylvania, 1746: Ann Greene

Ann Greene is an English servant woman, indentured to a Maryland man. Besides running away, the main thing wrong with her is that she doesn't know she's white. She has just run away with a mulatto servant named Isaac Cromwell.

Like so many thousands of other black slaves and white servants, the color of their skin is not important. What is important to them is their common oppression and common dreams of freedom. Whites and blacks, like Ann and Isaac, are constantly making common cause against the wealthy in the early days of the colonies. They are also marrying each other.

~ Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower*, 304

Philadelphia, 1805: Mixed Marriages

Thomas Branagan is visiting Boston after travelling through the West Indies and the South. Shocked, he writes:

There are many, very many blacks who...begin to feel themselves consequential [and] will not be satisfied unless they get white women for wives, and are exceedingly impertinent to white people in low circumstances....I solemnly swear, I have seen more white women married to, and deluded through the arts of seduction by Negroes in one year in Philadelphia, than the eight years I was visiting [West Indies and the Southern states]...There are perhaps hundreds of white women thus fascinated by black men in this city, and there are thousands of black children by them at present.

~ Quoted in Lerone Bennett Jr., *Before the Mayflower*, 304

Blacks and Whites Together

In the historical record of the first Europeans in the Western Hemisphere, they refer to themselves as “Christians,” “Puritans,” and “English.” They do not call themselves “white.” The concept of “white” was of no interest in Medieval and Renaissance Europe.

The first settlers in the United States knew nothing of skin color as a distinguishing mark. Racism came later as a system to keep blacks from allying with whites and to keep African Americans first in slavery and later in a state of constant oppression.

Prejudice according to skin color, therefore, is not “natural.” It is learned and it has historical roots. Those roots reach into the needs of the aristocratic elite, who wanted to hold on to their power. Divide and conquer tactics, pitting white servants against black slaves, systematically created the institution of racism, which could be called on in times of crises of power.

These crises occurred when the oppressed, no matter what the color, rebelled against injustice. It was then that the whites in power relied on the carefully cultivated system of racism.

~ See Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower*, 297-316

On July 2, 1839, on the Spanish slave ship “Amistad,” fifty-four African slaves, led by Cinque, mutinied, and killing the captain and three of the crew. For nearly two months the Africans tried to force the remaining crew to sail them back to Africa. When they went on shore at Long

Island, New York for provisions they were illegally captured by the U.S. Navy, Cinque and the other Africans were imprisoned and tried for murder.

Abolitionists including Lewis Tappan formed a defense committee while the U.S. government argued in court that the Africans were slaves and therefore property and they had committed murder. The Circuit Court of Hartford ruled that the ship had been taken on the high seas and that the Africans could not be charged with murder.

The Africans were set free. The next year they returned to their homeland, Sierra Leone.



Boston, 1829: Walker's Appeal

Born free, David Walker is one of those abolitionists who calls for universal emancipation of all blacks in Africa, the West Indies and the United States. His appeal is one of the most militant calls for the end of slavery.

Remember, Americans that we must and shall be free and as enlightened as you are. Will you wait until we shall under God obtain our liberty by the crushing arm of power? Will it not be dreadful for you? I speak, Americans, for your own good. We must and shall be free, I say, in spite of you. You may do your best to keep us in wretchedness and misery to enrich you and your children, but God will deliver us from under you. And we, we will be to you if we have to obtain our freedom by fighting. Throw away your fears and prejudices, then, and enlighten us and treat us like men, and we will like you more than we do now hate you; and tell us now no more colonization, for America is as much our country as it is yours.

~ William F. Cheek, *Black Resistance before the Civil War*, 143

Black Abolitionists

Much of the history of abolitionism has been written about whites struggling to eradicate slavery. Yet black people instigated much of the effort to abolish slavery. They freed themselves in a myriad of ways by running away, operating the Underground Railroad, speaking, and agitating for abolition. Blacks bankrolled and subscribed to William Lloyd Garrison's famous paper, *The Liberator*. In the 1830s the pioneer black abolitionists like David Walker paved the way for the giants of the 1840s.

Charles Lenox Remond was the first black preacher to become a professional antislavery lecturer. Samuel Ringgold Ward and Henry Highland Garnet were black pastors and activists. Martin R. Delaney was the first major Black Nationalist. Delaney wanted people to gain respect and be proud of being black. In the 1850s he advocated for a black state in Central America, the Western United States or Africa. The most famous of the black abolitionists of this period were Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass. By far the most radical voices calling for an immediate end to slavery were black.

~ See Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower*, 140-160

Buffalo, New York, 1843: Four Million

A new level of anger is rising in the black community. Impatience coupled with biblical sense of redemption becomes a volatile mixture, especially in the words of Rev. Henry Highland Garnet. Garnet is a young abolitionist minister from Troy, New York. The grandson of a Mandingo chieftain, he was born on a plantation in Maryland. His father escaped, taking the family to freedom when Henry was ten years old. As this twenty-seven-year-old black man steps to the podium at the black anti-slavery convention, a rush of anticipation sweeps the crowd.

Think how many tears you have poured out upon the soil which you have cultivated with unrequited toil and enriched with your blood; and then go to your lordly enslavers and tell them plainly that you are determined to be free. Appeal to their sense of justice, and tell them that they have no more right to oppress you than you have to enslave them.

Tell them in language which they cannot misunderstand of the exceeding sinfulness of slavery, and of the future judgment, and of the righteous retributions of an indignant God, Inform them that all you desire is freedom, and that nothing else will suffice....You had better all die immediately—than live slaves and entail your wretchedness upon their posterity.

He then invokes the names of black heroes like Nathaniel Turner and Denmark Vesey who led slave revolts in the South; Joseph Cinque, the leader of the slave revolt on board the slave ship

“Amistad”; Madison Washington, who successfully led the slave revolt on board the slave ship “Creole.” The Amistad slaves gained their freedom and sailed back to Sierra Leone. The Creole rebels went to Nassau and freedom.

And then in the style of the great black preachers he ends:

*Brethren, arise, arise! Strike for your lives and liberties! Now is the day and the hour. Let every slave throughout the land do this, and the days of slavery are numbered. You cannot be more oppressed than you have been—you cannot suffer greater cruelties than you have already. Remember that you are **four millions!***

*Let your motto be resistance! Resistance! **Resistance!** No oppressed people have ever secured their liberty without resistance. What kind of resistance you had better make, you must decide by the circumstances that surround you and according to the suggestions of expediency. Brethren, adieu! Trust in the living God. Labor for the peace of the human race, and remember that you are **four millions!***

~ Quoted in William F. Cheek, *Black Resistance before the Civil War*, 143-146, See also Vincent Harding, *The Other American Revolution*, 49

Georgia to Philadelphia, 1848: Masquerade

“Now William,” said Ellen, “listen to me and take my advice, and we shall be free in less than a month.” “Let me hear your plans, then” said William. “Take part of your money and purchase me a good suit of gentlemen’s apparel, and when the white people give us our holiday, let us go off to the north. I am white enough to go as the master, and you can pass as my servant.” “But you are not tall enough for a man,” said the husband. “Get me a pair of high-heeled boots, and they will bring me up more than an inch, and get me a very high hat, then I’ll do,” rejoined the wife. “But then, my dear, you would make a very boyish looking man, with no whiskers or moustache,” remarked William. “I could bind up my face in a handkerchief,” said Ellen, “as if I was suffering from the toothache, and then no one would discover the want of a beard.” “What if you are called upon to write your name in the books at the hotels?” “I would also bind up my right hand and put it in a sling, and that would be an excuse for not writing.” “I fear that you could not carry out the deception for so long a time, for it must be several hundred miles to the free States,” said William. “Come, William” entreated his wife, don’t be a coward! Get me the clothes, and I promise you we shall both be free in a couple of days. You have money enough to fit me out and to pay our passage to the North.”

The masquerade succeeds. Abolitionists welcome Ellen and William Craft into Philadelphia on Christmas morning.

~ Dorothy Sterling, ed., *We Are Your Sisters*, 62-64

Day to Day Resistance

Slave resistance took a variety of forms, but for every dramatic revolt there were dozens of instances of individual acts of resistance. More common than organized, large-scale rebellion was the daily resistance of running away, slowing down work, refusing to cooperate, striking back at a master, or hiding children in the woods to save them from being sold.

Running away required ingenuity and courage! Some slave women disguised themselves as men or boys. Some lived in caves close to the plantation to keep in touch with their families. One simply walked off the plantation, her children in her arms. Another woman had herself sealed in a crate as cargo, not to be opened until she arrived North.

Running away almost always meant enduring hardships. The Littles were a slave couple who walked hundreds of miles barefoot, with blisters on their feet, braving wolves, bounty hunters, and masses of mosquitoes to reach Chicago and freedom.

Those who remained behind also resisted. Milla Granson, a slave woman, ran a midnight school teaching other slaves to read and write from twelve at night until two in the morning. A number of them wrote their own passes and started for Canada. Some mothers worked extra hours doing wash and ironing and after years saved enough money to buy their children from slavery. Some of those purchases cost hundreds of dollars.

As part of resistance, slaves developed a system of reconnaissance among white folks and forms of communication among slaves that were undetected by whites.

All these forms of resistance aimed at reclaiming the power taken away from blacks by the oppressive system of slavery and racism. In a variety of ways slaves were able to take charge of their lives and continue to hold on to their human dignity.

~ See Dorothy Sterling, ed., *We Are Your Sisters*; Gerda Lerner, ed., *Black Women in White America*

The South, 1840s: Day-to-Day Resistance

A daughter remembers what her slave mother taught her:

The one doctrine of my mother's teaching which was branded upon my senses was I should never let anyone abuse me. "I'll kill you, gal, if you don't stand up for yourself," she would say. Fight, and if you can't fight, kick: if you can't kick, then bite.

~ Gerda Lerner, ed., *Black Women in White America*, 35

The South, 1840s: “Foolin’ Massa”

Without any knowledge of newspapers, or books, or telegraphy, the slaves have their own way of gathering news from the whole country. They have secret signs, an “Underground Telephone.”...Intuitively they learn all the tricks of dramatic art. Their perceptions are quickened. When seemingly absorbed in work, they see and hear all that is going on around them. They memorize with wonderful ease and correctness....

One former slave woman says, “My father and the other boys used to crawl under the house an’ lie on the ground to hear massa’ read the newspaper to missis’ when they first began to talk about the [Civil] war.”

“I couldn’t read but my uncle could,” says another. “I was a waiting-maid, an’ used to help missis’ to dress in the morning. If massa’ wanted to tell her something he didn’t want me to know, he used to spell it out. I could remember the letters, an as soon as I got away I ran to uncle an’ spelled them over to him, an’ he told me what they meant.”

I [the interviewer] was attracted by this, and asked if she could do this now.

“Try me missis, try me an’ see!” she exclaimed. So I spelled a long sentence as rapidly as possible, without stopping between the words. She immediately repeated...without missing a letter.

~ Gerda Lerner, ed., *Black Women in White America*, 29-30

Massachusetts, 1851: Shadrach

A year before the U.S. Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Law, making it illegal to harbor or help runaway slaves, Rev. Lewis Hayden, a black preacher, and twenty of his friends swept into a Massachusetts courtroom and spirited the slave Shadrach away before he was sent back into slavery.

Several of the abductors are now being tried. Their guilt is undeniable; there were many witnesses. The jury deliberates a long time. All believe them guilty except one. Whatever they do they cannot convince this man to convict them. It is a hung jury. The conspirators go free.

The man who held out for acquittal himself drove Shadrach from Concord to Leominster during his escape.

~ See Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom’s Ferment*

New York, 1857: Liberty Born of Struggle

Frederick Douglass, a freed slave, gives one of his greatest speeches at the West India Emancipation Celebration:

The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims have been born of struggle!...If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. The struggle may be a moral one; or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will....

~ Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, 179

The South, 1873: Reconstruction

The end of the Civil War brings new political power to blacks. Three years before a former slave was elected a U.S. senator from Mississippi, and now seven blacks are in the U.S. House of Representatives. There are black postmasters, state legislators, policemen, and mayors. It seems like a new day is dawning. It is an era of firsts: the first black diplomat, the first black woman lawyer, the first black graduate of Harvard University, the first black judges.....

Political rights are possible, but economic rights are denied. Frederick Douglass, Thaddeus Stevens, and Charles Sumner lead the fight for *forty acres and a mule*. They want the U.S. government to break up the large plantations and give the newly freed blacks forty acres so they can really start a new life. Congress fails to pass any such legislation, so the southern blacks are forced into sharecropping.

This arrangement soon becomes a new system of oppression, as the black farmers have to rely on whites for loans and for marketing their crops. They fall into debt and the whites hold them in another form of slavery—debt slavery.

~ See Lerone Bennett, JR., *Before the Mayflower*

The South, 1890s: Separate and Unequal

In the first generation after the Civil War, blacks and whites mingled in every activity. For two decades whites worked to undermine the gains of Reconstruction. In 1873 the U.S. Supreme

Court ruled that there were two kinds of citizenship—state and federal—and that the Fourteenth Amendment that guaranteed civil rights to all people was designed to protect the rights of federal citizenship only.

In a number of civil rights cases in 1883 the high court ruled that states could not discriminate but at the same time created an opening for individuals to do so. By the 1890s many southern states had passed laws segregating railroads and other facilities. There were now two Americas, one white, the other black—separate and unequal.

Chicago, 1901: Ida B. Wells

I have seen very small white children hang their black dolls.

It is not the child's fault; he is simply an apt pupil.

~ Gerda Lerner, ed., *Black Women in White America*, 147

The century has just turned. Nine out of every ten black people live in the South. The Jim Crow laws are in full effect.

Ida B. Wells was born in Holly Springs, Mississippi. Orphaned at an early age, she worked her way through college and became a journalist. Mobs finally drove her from the South because of her fierce editorials against lynching. Settling in Chicago, she continues to write and speak out against lynching. She reports that from 1878 to 1898, ten thousand black people have been lynched. In the South, the lynchings are justified because the blacks involved have raped a white woman. In her careful investigation into the record

...it shows that men, not a few, but hundreds have been lynched for misdemeanors, while others have suffered death for no offense known to the law, the causes assigned being "mistaken identity," "insult," "bad reputation," unpopularity," "violating contract," "running quarantine," "giving evidence," "frightening children by shooting at rabbit," etc.

And as far as the charge of rape goes, in 1900 less than fifteen per cent were so charged.

Ida B. Wells begins a national campaign to stop lynching.

~ Herbert Aptheker, ed., *Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, 1:804

United States, 1904: Causes of Lynching

Black activist Mary Church Terrell, in her fight to stop lynching, speaks out:

Before 1904 was three months old, 31 Negroes had been lynched. Of this number, 15 were murdered within one week in Arkansas, and one was shot to death in Springfield, Ohio, by a mob composed of men who did not take the trouble to wear masks. Hanging, shooting, and burning black men, women, and children in the United States have become so common that such occurrences create but little sensation and evoke but slight comment now.

...It is a great mistake to suppose that rape is the real cause of lynching in the South. Beginning with the Ku Klux Klan the Negro has been constantly subjected to some form of organized violence ever since he became free. It is easy to prove that rape is simply the pretext and not the cause of lynching. Statistics show that, out of every 100 Negroes who are lynched, from 75-85 are not even accused of this crime, and many who are accused of it are innocent...

What then is the cause of lynching? At the last analysis, it will be discovered that there are just two causes of lynching. In the first place, it is due to race hatred, the hatred of a stronger people toward a weaker who were once held as slaves. In the second place, it is due to the lawlessness so prevalent in the section where nine-tenths of the lynchings occur.....

Lynching is the aftermath of slavery. The white men who shoot Negroes to death and flay them while alive, and the white women who apply flaming torches to their oil-soaked bodies today, are the sons and daughters of women who had but little, if any, compassion on the race when it was enslaved....

~ Gerda Lerner, ed., *Black Women in White America*, 207-209

We return.

We return from fighting.

We return fighting.

~ W.E.B. Dubois

Effects of World War I

Many African Americans fought in World War I. Although the army was segregated and they suffered many of the same abuses and name-calling they endured in the United States, there was a change in them when they returned home after being told they were fighting to make

the world safe for democracy. The contradictions of their own unjust situation became much clearer. They came home to poverty, discrimination, and the resurgence of white hatred.

Something had to give. And in 1919 it did as the nation exploded into twenty-six different outbreaks of racial violence.

Washington D.C., 1913: Jubilee

This is the fiftieth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, the year of jubilee. President Woodrow Wilson orders the segregation of restaurants, offices, and facilities in the Post Office, Treasury, Interior Department, and Library of Congress. In four years he will lead the United States into World War I, in order to “make the world safe for democracy.”

Today he greets an African American delegation saying:

Segregation is not humiliating, but a benefit and ought to be so regarded by you gentlemen.

~ *Stereotypes, Distortions and Omissions*, 28

The United States 1917 to 1969

East St. Louis, 1917: Race Riot

Whites are protesting the employment of blacks. The whites call in the militia and police. Lieutenant Arbuckle of the United States Army Reserve Corp is in East St. Louis on business on July 2. He sees whites burning railway cars in yards...members of the militia of Illinois shooting blacks. He sees policemen of East St. Louis shooting blacks. He sees mobs go to the homes of blacks and nail boards over the doors and windows and then set fires and burn them up. He sees the whites take little children out of the arms of their mothers and throw them into the fires and burn them up.

~ Paul Jacobs and Saul Landau, *To Serve the Devil*, I: 175

New York, 1917: Silent Parade of Protest

It is July 28 and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is waging an effective campaign against lynching. The little children, dressed in white, are leading

them. Behind them march the women in white followed by the men in black, the color of mourning. Although silent, they carry their words of protest on banners and streamers.

Just before the American flag is a cloth banner with sewn letters: *Your hands are full of blood.*

The children carry signs: *Mother, do lynchers go to heaven? Mr. President, why not make America safe for democracy?*

On Fifth Avenue, twenty thousand African American feet walk for justice.

~ Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower*, 349

Valdosta, Georgia, 1918: Lynching

The white mob hangs Mary Turner from a tree. A couple of them douse her with gasoline and motor oil. Another takes a match. When she has finished burning, a man steps forward with a pocket knife and slits open her abdomen. *Out tumbled the prematurely born child. Two feeble cries it gave—and received for the answer the heel of a stalwart man, as life was ground out of the tiny form.*

During this year, whites lynch sixty people.

~ Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower*, 352

Jean Toomer

When Jean Toomer visited Sparta, Georgia in 1921, echoes of the gruesome lynching of Mary Turner and the rash of eleven other lynchings that followed were still resonating, surrounding the black population of the nearby areas in a haze of fear and paranoia. It was in this setting that Toomer composed a collection of stories that comprised the novel *Cane*. In one of these stories, "Kabnis," an NAACP report's account of Mary Turner is recreated with few alterations, depicting the brutal execution of Mame Lamkins at the hands of a lynch mob.

They killed her in the street, an some white man seein' the risi'n in her stomach as she lay there soppo in her blood like any cow, took an ripped her belly open, an the kid fell out. It was living, but a nigger baby ain't supposed t live. So he jabbed his knife in it and stuck it to a tree. And then they all went away.

France, 1918: Secret Orders

Three of the four all-black regiments fighting in World War I receive the Croix de Guerre for valor. U.S. military policy arrest black soldiers for walking down the street with French women.

Secret orders from General Pershing's headquarters to the French Mission:

1. *We must prevent the rise of any pronounced degree of intimacy between French officers and black officers....We cannot deal with them [black officers] on the same plane as with the white American officer without deeply wounding the latter. We must not eat with them, must not shake hands or seek to talk or meet with them outside of the requirements of military service.*
2. *We must not commend too highly the American troops, particularly in the presence of [white] Americans....*
3. *Make a point of keeping the native cantonment population from "spoiling" the Negroes. [White] Americans become greatly incensed at any public expression of intimacy between white women and black men.*

~ Lerone Bennett Jr., *Before the Mayflower*, 348-349

1919: Red Summer

Historian Vincent Harding summarizes the atmosphere of 1919:

From Charleston, South Carolina, to Longview, Texas, from Washington, D.C. to Chicago, Illinois, black and white people went to war on the streets. There were various specific occasions: the taunting attacks of arrogant white servicemen; the movement of white mobs against black people; the violent reaction of whites to the continuing black search for a place to live and breathe.

Most often the initial intention of the whites was the same: to invade the black community, to attempt another slaughter, another scorched earth. But in 1919, the outcome was different; a new stage in history had been reached.

Throughout the nation that spring and summer, thousands of black people decided to fight back, to move out into the streets against the white aggressors. Often they pressed on to carry the offensive against their historic oppressors. Especially in Washington and Chicago, the fighting was fierce and extensive.

Black men set up roadblocks of wood, bricks, and concrete on the streets of their communities! Both blacks and whites used cars of armed men to roar like armed military vehicles through the opposite communities. Black snipers operated from the windows of houses. Bands of attackers swooped down on persons of the opposite race who happened into their territory. Everywhere, black veterans played a central role in the fighting, often using weapons they had managed to smuggle back into the black community, weapons as large as machine guns. In Chicago, it lasted for almost a week, spreading over much of that sprawling city (Harding, 104-105).

United States, 1919: Red Summer

Black troops come home after fighting what they were told was “the war to make the world safe for democracy.” This year there are seventy-six lynchings. Segregation is everywhere. In the South black sharecroppers are enslaved by a debt system that keeps whites in power. The Ku Klux Klan is resurging. What could not be won with silent protest or rational debate spills into the streets of America.

Poet Claude McKay, part of what is to be called the Harlem Renaissance, writes:

*If we must die, let it not be like hogs,
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock of our accursed lot.
If we must die, O let us nobly die....
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!*

Twenty-six race riots explode throughout the country.

~ Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower*, 353; Vincent Harding, *The Other American Revolution*, 105

A New Form of Resistance

The resistance of blacks in the South took another form as the new century began. They simply left the area. In 1910 the first wave of black migration came north. During that decade 300,000 blacks moved, mostly to the large urban areas of Chicago, Detroit, and New York. From 1920 to 1930 the second wave of 1,300,000 came north. The third wave in the 1940s of 2,500,000 completed the largest migration in U.S. history.

Montgomery, Alabama, 1955: Front of the Bus

A few weeks earlier she was at a leadership training workshop at Highlander Folk School in the Tennessee Mountains. Rosa Parks is a seamstress by trade, quiet but determined. When she boards the bus that night after a long day at work, she doesn't feel defiant, just tired. But when the bus driver tells her to move to the back of the bus so that a white can sit in her seat, she refuses. She is arrested and the women of Montgomery swing into action.

Jo Ann Gibson Robinson hears about the arrest and realized that now is the time for action. For a year, she and other women have been planning a bus boycott, just waiting for the right moment. That moment has now arrived. She mimeographs the first leaflet calling for a boycott. She and other women convince the black Montgomery pastors to lead it. The women organize carpools, raise money, negotiate with the white authorities, pass out leaflets; in short, do all the behind the scenes activities that make the boycott work.

For over a year they walk miles to work, car pool, sing, and encourage each other to keep from losing hope. By the end, a black person can sit wherever he or she wants to on the bus.

A young preacher who was thrown into leadership of the boycott becomes known outside of Montgomery. His name—Martin Luther King, Jr.

~ Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It*

Greensboro, 1960: Sit-in

Late Monday afternoon, February 1, four black freshmen from North Carolina A & T take seats at a downtown Woolworth's lunch counter. They ask for service but receive none. When the counter closes they return to campus.

The following morning thirty students return and occupy half of the lunch counter. They stay for two hours without being served. The next day they return, filling all sixty-six seats at the counter. They are now national news, inspiring sit-ins all across the South. In some places ice cream sundaes are poured over the protestors' heads and they have to endure insults, taunts, and violence. Most protestors keep their poise and their sense of humor.

A waitress tells a pair of sit-inners, *I'm sorry, but we don't serve Negroes here. Oh, we don't eat them either*, comes the reply.

~ Claybourne Canon, *In Struggle*, 11-12

The Black Freedom Movement Continues

The Black Freedom Movement surged forward from 1956 to 1972. The energy of resistance that young African Americans mobilized during that period has rarely been equaled in U.S. history.

In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court, in its historic *Brown vs. the Board of Education* case, said that it was illegal to segregate schools according to race.

In 1956 Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of the bus in Montgomery, Alabama, igniting a bus boycott that lasted over a year and began what has been called the civil rights movement.

In 1960 four North Carolina A & T students sat in at a Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro. They returned with more students until they were finally served. As a tactic, the sit-ins spread like wildfire across the South. In that year alone fifty thousand protestors carried out sit-ins in seventy-eight communities, resulting in two thousand arrests.

The sit-ins were spontaneous eruptions of pent-up anger over decades of injustices. By themselves they had no direction. Since most were organized by students, Ella Baker of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference brought together some of the leaders, and they founded the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). SNCC was to play a role in the future of deepening and advancing the Black Freedom Movement beyond the immediate goals of civil rights.

Jackson, Mississippi, 1961: Freedom Rides

The whites firebomb a bus full of Freedom Riders in Anniston, Georgia. White mobs regularly beat riders as they leave the buses. But Parchman State Penitentiary is reserved for the real criminals—the Freedom Riders themselves. They have all of their belongings taken. Strip searched, they are put under maximum security. When they begin singing the guards threaten to take away their mattresses. They keep singing and the guards take the mattresses.

They write freedom songs: *Woke up this morning with my mind set on freedom....* The guards take their sheets. They keep singing. The guards take their toothbrushes and towels. They keep singing, getting louder all the time.

They sleep for three nights on steel springs without covers and with cold air deliberately blown on them. And in the morning when they awaken after restless, sleepless nights, *their minds are set on freedom....*

Freedom Rides

In 1961 the initiative passed to the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) as they initiated freedom rides in the South, reviving a tactic used in 1947.

Under federal law, it was illegal to have segregated buses and waiting rooms. But in the South local authorities never enforced in law. Determined to confront this injustice, seven blacks and six whites left Washington, D.C. on May 4. They integrated the buses; when the bus stopped the whites went into the black waiting room and the blacks into the white one.

The group was met with violence. One rider had to have fifty-stitches in his head, and a white man from Madison, Wisconsin, was so badly beaten by a white mob that he was damaged for life.

SNCC did not want the violence to stop the rides so they took up the call for more riders. When arrested they began to chant, "Jail, No Bail!" Their tactic was to fill the jails and bring national attention to the injustice. Their courage and commitment became contagious as thousands of young people joined in the movement.

SNCC tactics were simple. Organizers would go into the most racist communities and look for the indigenous black leadership. One commented, "There was always a mama. She is usually a militant woman in the community, outspoken, understanding, and willing to catch hell, having already caught her share." Women like these were at the heart of the movement.

Respect in the black community as well as in SNCC was measured by how many times an organizer went to jail. As early as 1962 many SNCC organizers had been jailed more than twenty times and some had been beaten.

McComb, Mississippi, 1962: Defiance

Diane Nash Bevel is charged with contributing to the delinquency of minors because she taught nonviolent tactics to McComb teenagers. She has just found out that she is pregnant and now wants to refuse her option for appeal and take the jail sentence.

I believe if I go to jail now it may help hasten that day when my child and all children will be free—not only on the day of their birth but for all their lives.

The judge, not wanting to risk adverse publicity, suspends her sentence. She still serves ten days for sitting on the white side of the courtroom.

~ Claybourne Carson, *In Struggle*, 68

Winona, Mississippi, 1963: Freedom

Fanny Lou Hamer, Annell Ponder, and four other African Americans are returning from a meeting in South Carolina. As a matter of principle, when they get off the bus in Winona, they walk into the white waiting room. The police arrest them all. In jail the police separate them. Annell, in her twenties, begins screaming and praying to God to forgive them. They take Fanny Lou to a cell where the police force two black prisoners to beat her all over her body with a night stick. Fanny Lou Hamer joined the Freedom riders because *the only thing they could do to me was kill me and it seemed like they's been trying to do that a little bit at a time ever since I could remember.*

The next day a group of SNCC people arrive, led by Lawrence Guyot, a twenty-three-year-old graduate of Tugaloo College. Lawrence insists on seeing the prisoners and refuses to answer the State Trooper with "Yes, sir" and "No, sir." After slapping him, the trooper hands Guyot over to the White Citizen's Council, who beat him so badly he cannot lift his arms. His eyes swell shut.

Finally, another SNCC worker arrives and gains entrance to Annell's cell. Her face is also swollen, she can barely talk. She looks at the visitor and whispers one word... *freedom.*

~ Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*, 94-95

Mississippi, 1965: Black Power

Black power! Shouts Stokely Carmichael, and the crowd enthusiastically responds, *Black power!* The Northern cities are in flames. Four black children are killed in a church bombing while attending Sunday school in a Birmingham Baptist Church. The litany of deaths and violence seems endless. Some blacks are now talking about self-defense.

...for once, black people are going to use the words they want to use—not just the words whites want to hear.

~ Claybourne Carson, *In Struggle*, 219

Voter Registration

In 1962 the spontaneous sit-ins gave way to door-to-door voter registration drives. Whites had systematically denied the right to vote to black people for generations. Using poll taxes, literacy

test, and sheer intimidation, whites kept blacks from registering. SNCC and other civil rights groups were out to change that.

Charles Sherrod and Cordell Reagon talked to people about there being “worse chains than jail and prison.” They referred to a system that imprisons the mind and robs people of their creativity. They mocked the system that taught people how to be “good Negroes” instead of good people. As organizers they told people what had been accomplished through resistance and registration.

In 1963 in the South, 930 public protests took place in 115 cities. Over twenty thousand persons were arrested. Ten deaths were directly related to the protests, and at least thirty-five bombings occurred. In Birmingham, the viciousness of racism was brought home to the U.S. public as Eugene “Bull” Connor, director of public safety, unleashed fire hoses and police dogs against marchers. Martin Luther King was arrested there, writing from prison his famous “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” Also that year more than two hundred thousand people converged on Washington demanding “Freedom...Now!”

IN 1964, SNCC went into Mississippi with a voter education and registration drive that it called Freedom Summer. Organizers set up freedom schools for children to learn about their African American roots of resistance. They went into small towns where the law and the white citizens’ councils were one and the same. That summer, the bodies of three of those freedom workers were dragged from a ditch, on the same day that Lyndon Johnson announced the U.S. bombing of Vietnam.

By 1965, Freedom Summer had put SNCC into the national limelight. More militant than their older counterparts in the movement, they began to see both the depth of racism in the United States and the need to make international connections.

Selma, Alabama, exploded on the scene as state troopers stopped peaceful marchers from crossing Pettis Bridge. When the marchers refused to turn around, the police beat them with billy clubs and threw canisters of tear gas.

Continued white violence made many blacks wonder about the effectiveness of nonviolence. In a rural Alabama county that year, the Black Panther Party was formed. Stokely Carmichael, a SNCC organizer who had been arrested twenty-seven times, began using the slogan “Black Power.” It resonated with the people as their frustration grew in the face of white racism.

In the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, the first of several urban riots exploded. SNCC was beginning to make the connections between racism at home and imperialism abroad. Why were young black men dying to save democracy in Vietnam when they were kept from voting at home?

In the summer of 1967, 150 cities were hit by urban rebellions, including Newark and Detroit. The Vietnam War was heating up; four hundred thousand U.S. soldiers were fighting

there. Martin Luther King became outspoken in his criticism of the Vietnam War. He too was making the economic and international connections with racism at home and injustice and intervention abroad. Those in power understood how dangerous his statements were for them.

~ Vincent Harding, *The Other American Revolution*; Claybourne Carson, *In Struggle*

Harlem, 1964: Malcolm X

*The key to our success lies in **united action**....As long as the freedom struggle of the 22 million Afro Americans is labeled a civil rights issue it remains a domestic problem under the jurisdiction of the United States....But once our struggle is lifted...to the level of **human rights**, our freedom struggle has then become **internationalized**.*

~ Malcolm X

When Malcolm rises to speak, he talks in terms that are plain, direct, devoid of flowery trimming. He uses metaphors and figures of speech that are lean and simple, rooted in the ordinary experiences of his audiences. He knows their minds and hearts because he identifies with them. They laugh, they learn, they move forward. He is down-to-earth and totally consumed by love for the oppressed.

Malcolm founds the Organization of Afro-American Unity in order to put before the United Nations the petition charging the United States government with genocide against twenty-two million black Americans.

...We assert that in those areas where the government is either unable or unwilling to protect the lives and property of our people, that our people are within their rights to protect themselves by whatever means necessary....

...Basically, there are two kinds of power that count in America: economic and political, with social power deriving from the two. In order for Afro-Americans to control their destiny, they must be able to control and affect the decisions which control their destiny: economic, political and social, This can only be done through organization....

Malcolm X does not equivocate. He goes straight to the point: *We are living in an era of revolution, and the revolt of the American Negro is part of that rebellion against oppression and colonization which has characterized this era...We are today seeing a global rebellion of the oppressed against the oppressor, the exploited against the exploiter.* This man is dangerous. In a few months he will be killed.

~ Manning Marable, *Race, Reform and Rebellion*, 95; John Henrik Clarke, ed., *Malcolm X: The Man and His Times*, xvii, 337, 339

New York, 1965: Another Martyr

It is February 21. A few days before, arsonists firebombed the house of Malcolm X where he and his family were sleeping. He is scheduled to speak tonight. Talking to Brother Earl he says...*I always knew it would end like this....Brother, I'm sorry I never had a chance to tell you about my father. He, too, tried to help the people and was hunted and finally killed by the powers of that day. Now, I know how he must have felt, with a family and all.*

...Don't look so sad. I'm no stranger to danger. I have lived with danger all of my life. I never expected to die of old age. I know the power structure will not let me. I know that I have done the very best that I could to help our people....I did not want an organization that depended on the life of one man. The organization must be able to survive on its own.

The first shot rings out. Then a pause and a long series of shots! Malcolm X, the *black skinning prince*, is dead.

Two decades later, evidence will surface of the involvement of the FBI and other federal agencies in his assassination.

~ John Henrik Clarke, ed., *Malcolm X: The Man and His Times*, 91, 95; Manning Marable, *Race, Reform and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1982*, 100

The North, 1967: The Radical King

As the Vietnam War drags on and white violence continues, Martin Luther King becomes radicalized. The FBI is after him because his words sound more and more like those of the young SNCC militants.

He sees now the limits of the U.S. government and how it is imperative for black people to formulate new tactics that no longer depend upon the goodwill of that government. These tactics will have to *compel unwilling authorities to yield to the mandates of justice.*

The dispossessed of this nation—the poor, both white and Negro—live in a cruelly unjust society. They must organize a revolution against that injustice, not against the lives of the persons who are their fellow citizens, but against the structures through which the society is refusing to...lift the load of poverty.

The storm is rising against the privileged minority of the earth, from which there is no shelter in isolation or armament. The storm will not abate until a just distribution of the fruits of the earth enables men everywhere to live in dignity and human decency. The American Negro...may be

the vanguard of a prolonged struggle that may change the shape of the world, as billions of deprived shake and transform the earth in their quest for life, liberty and justice.

This is not the King who says, *I have a dream*....This is not the King seeking integration and civil rights. This is the King demanding revolution and redistribution of the world's wealth.

He is beginning to see the connections between Latin American problems and United States policies. *Americans must help their nation repent of her modern economic imperialism.* This man is now too dangerous. In a few months he will be killed.

~ Vincent Harding, *The Other American Revolution*, 198-199

Washington, D.C., 1967: COINTELPRO

Black militancy is on the rise. People are in motion. The U.S. government is worried.

J. Edgar Hoover, head of the FBI issues a memo concerning a counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO) against black nationalist groups....*The purpose of this new counterintelligence endeavor is to expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize the activities of black nationalist hate-type organizations and groupings, their leadership, spokesmen, membership, and supporters....*

The memo directs field offices to keep these operations totally secret. What emerges is a variety of tactics to carry out this directive.

An internal memo congratulates them on a job well done: *shootings, beatings and a high degree of unrest continue to prevail in the ghetto area...it is felt that a substantial amount of the unrest is directly attributable to this program.*

In the guise of infiltrating white hate groups, the FBI actually arms, directs, and protects a variety of racist organizations which they use to attack progressive groups.

The FBI targets CORE, SCLC, SNCC—all veteran civil rights organizations. The black leaders who cannot be silenced, embarrassed, discredited, or co-opted are killed.

~ Brian Glick, *War at Home: Covert Action Against U.S. Activists and What You Can Do About It*, 41-62

Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO)

FBI agents infiltrated progressive groups and became provocateurs directed to disrupt, spread rumors, provoke splits, sabotage activities, steal funds, exacerbate rivalries, publicly embarrass leaders and generally undermine trust and instill fear among groups and supporters. From the outside, the FBI waged psychological warfare against progressive groups and leaders by planting false media stories, passing out bogus leaflets and publications, forging correspondence, writing inflammatory letters, tampering with the mail and telephone and generally creating “disinformation.” The FBI also used false arrest, conspicuous surveillance, and political trials to harass leaders and activists. And finally, the FBI resorted to violence. The FBI maneuvered the Mafia to move against activist-comedian Dick Gregory and incited violent rivals to attack Malcolm X and the Black Panther Party.

~ Brian Glick, *War at Home: Covert Action Against U.S. Activists and What You Can Do About It*,
41-62

Washington, D.C., 1969: FBI Internal Memo

For maximum effectiveness of the counterintelligence program, and to prevent wasted effort, long-range goals are being set.

...Prevent the coalition of militant black nationalist groups. In unity there is strength...

...Prevent the rise of a “messiah” who could unify, and electrify, the militant black nationalist movement....

...Prevent militant black nationalist groups and leaders from gaining respectability...

...Prevent the long-range growth of militant black nationalist organizations, especially among youth.

~ Brian Glick, *War at Home*, 78-79

Oakland, 1969: The Black Panther Party

They run a free breakfast program for young black kids; they monitor police brutality; they open a free health clinic; they educate each other about the history of the black struggle in the United States. They also carry guns in self-defense.

Part of their ten-point program says: *We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace.*

By July, they are the targets of 233 separate actions under the FBI's COINTELPRO operations. By the end of the year, twenty-seven Black Panthers are dead from police bullets. Over seven hundred are in jail or arrested.

~ Brian Glick, *War at Home*, 18; Manning Marable, *Race, Reform and Rebellion*, 122, 125

Chicago, 1969: Fred Hampton and Mark Clark

Fred Hampton is a charismatic black leader pulling together a "rainbow" coalition of progressive groups. Taking on national leadership of the group in the wake of the jailing and exile of other leaders, Hampton becomes a prime target of COINTELPRO. On December 4, after Fred Hampton has been drugged asleep by an FBI infiltrator, a fourteen-man police hit squad with automatic weapons attack. Fred Hampton and Chicago Black Panther leader Mark Clark are killed. A year later, a federal grand jury find that the police fired eighty-three shots into the apartment, while only one shot was fired at the police.

An elaborate cover-up begins. It will take years before the parents and survivors will be paid \$1.8 million in damages by federal and local governments for the carnage of that winter night.

~ Brian Glick, *War at Home*, 63; Manning Marable, *Race, Reform and Rebellion*, 142

Indigenous Resistance: North America

Jamestown, 1622: "Native Infidels"



Logo of the Peace and Dignity Journeys, 1992.

This non-profit organization plans a cross-country relay from Alaska to Argentina, creating an event that honors and recognizes the indigenous people throughout the continent for their give hundred years of struggle and survival.

The joint-stock company from London that financed the Jamestown settlement expected large profits. Edward Waterhouse, an official of the company, writing after the attack by the Powhatan, outlines the theory and tactics that would guide the attitudes of most European settlers for generations in their relations with the native population.

Because our hands which before were tied with gentleness and faire usage, are now set at liberty by the treacherous violence of the Savages, not untying the knot, but cutting it: So that we, who hitherto have had possession of no more ground then their waste, and our purchase

gained: may now by right of Warre, and Law of Nations, invade the Country, and destroy them who sought to destroy us: whereby we shall enjoy our cultivated places, turning the laborious Mattocke into the victorious Sword (wherein there is more ease, benefit, and glory) and assessing the fruits of other labours. Now their cleared grounds in all their villages (which are situated in the fruitfulest places of the land) shall be inhabited by us...

Because the way of conquering them is much more easie then of civilizing them by faire means, for they are a rude, barbarous and naked people... Besides that, a conquest may be of many, and at once; but civility is in particular, and slow, the effect of long time and great industry. Moreover, victorie of them may be gained many wayes; by force, by surprise, by famine in burning their corne, by destroying and burning their Boats, Canoes, and Houses, by breaking their fishing Weares, by assailing them in their huntings, whereby they get their greatest sustenance in Winter, by pursuing and chasing them with our horses, and blood-Hounds to draw after them, and Mastives to teare them, which take this naked, tanned, deformed Savages, for no other then wild beasts, and are so fierce and fell upon them, that they fear them worse then their old Devill... By these and sundry other wayes, as by driving them (when they flye) upon their enemies, who are round about them, and by animating and abetting their enemies against them, may their ruine or subjection be soone effected...

Because the Indians who before were used as friends may now most justly be compelled to servitude and drudgery, and supply the roome of men that labour, whereby even the meanest of the Plantation may employ themselves more entirely in their Arts and Occupations, which are more generous. Whilest Savages performe their inferious workes digging in mynes, and the like...

Following this advice, the English make war on the Powhatans year after year until by 1642 they are almost completely exterminated.

~ *Chronicles of American Indian Protest*, 4-5

First Settlement

Jamestown, the first permanent European colony in what was to be the United States, was located in the territory of the Great Powhatan Confederacy. The Jamestown settlers came to this hemisphere on business, their chief aim financial profit. They wanted to trade, but first they had to survive.

They survived those first years thanks to the indigenous population. Captain John Smith wrote that they were given "corn and bread ready made." In the winter of 1608-1609, the colonists traded "10 quarters of corn for a copper kettle." Later they got from the indigenous one bushel of corn for every inch of copper. Still later, when the Powhatan were the ones starving instead

of the English, the colonists traded four hundred bushels of corn for a “mortgage on their whole countries.”

Wahunsonacock, (called King Powhatan by the English) tried for peace at all costs. He resolved many incidents without war, including the kidnapping of his own daughter Pocahontas. When Wahunsonacock died, his brother Opechancanough became chief.

The colonists provoked many conflicts. For example, English livestock, especially pigs, would get loose and damage the unfenced gardens of the Powhatan. But if the Powhatan damaged the pig, the English retaliated against the Powhatans until the conflict escalated to the point that the English burned a Powhatan village and killed a dozen people.

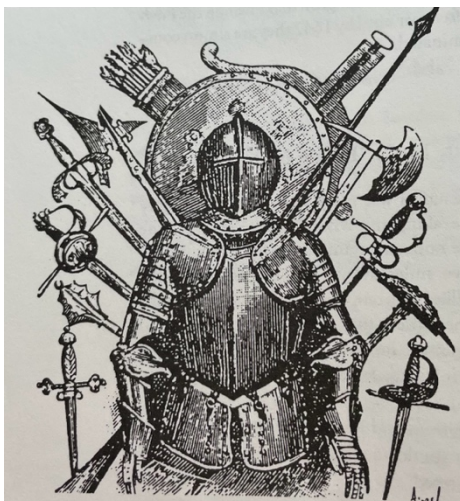
Opechancanough had a pessimistic view of what the colonists had in mind for the land and the Powhatan. History has proved him right. When his nation was already suffering terrible losses from European diseases, on March 22, 1622, he led an attack by the confederacy, killing 347 colonists. The response by the colonists was to articulate an ideology that totally dehumanized the native population, equating them with savages and therefore justifying their extermination.

~ See *Chronicles of American Indian Protest*, 1-6

*Could it not be contrived to send the small pox among the disaffected tribes of Indians
We must on this occasion use every stratagem to reduce them.*

~ British Lord Jeffrey Amherst

Connecticut, 1637: “Frying in the Fire”



The Europeans came armed with crossbows, battle axes, armor and firearms. The indigenous had bows and arrows and tomahawks. The unequal firepower resulted in heavy losses for the indigenous population.

In May, the English war party surrounds a secondary Pequot village along the Mystic River. Most of the inhabitants are noncombatants, since the main force of warriors is five miles away. The English and their Narraganset allies infiltrate the town and set fire to the wigwams. In the battle as they retreat, the English wound twenty Narraganset because they find it difficult to distinguish their friends from their enemies.

The English regroup and wait for the survivors fleeing from the fire. By sundown, a large majority of the Pequot tribe lies slaughtered.

William Bradford writes, soon after that day, *It was a fearful sight to see them thus frying in the fire and the streams of blood quenching the same, and horrible was the stink and scent thereof; but the victory seemed a sweet sacrifice, and they gave praise thereof to God, who had wrought so wonderfully for them...*

One of the captains who was there writes, *God...laughed [at]his Enemies and the Enemies of his People to Scorn making them as a fiery Oven...[and] filing the Place with Dead Bodies.*

The English enslave the survivors and sell some to the West Indies for needed capital. One of New England's first historians' writes about the trip on Captain John Gallup's slave ship *which proved [to be] Charon's ferry boat unto them, for it was found the quickest was to feed the fishes with'em*

An English officer, John Underhill, also keeps a record of the day's battle, reporting that the Narraganset cried out concerning the Englishmen's way of fighting, *Mach it Mach it; that is, It is naught, it is naught [bad or wicked] because it is too furious and slays too many men.*

The savages are appalled at the savagery of the civilized.

~ Gary Nash, *Red, White, and Black*, 84-85

Massachusetts Bay Colony

All the factors that produced conflicts in Jamestown were present in Massachusetts, with the addition of religion. The Puritans believed they were sent to this "hideous and desolate wilderness full of wild beasts and wild men" on a God-directed mission to establish a "city on a hill." This new society would "shine like a beacon" back to England as an example of how pious people should live.

According to historian Gary Nash, the indigenous population became two obstacles to the Puritans. First, they controlled the land that the English wanted. Second, as "savages" they threatened the psychological identity of the Puritans. If they could not control this land and the inhabitants as they thought God had directed them to do, then they would incur God's wrath for their failure.

They did not try to "convert the "heathen" to Christianity, as the thousands of Catholic missionaries did in the Spanish-dominated parts of the Americas. Rather the Puritans tried to bring the indigenous under civil authority, subjecting them to a white code of behavior. As in

the rest of the Americas, here too the indigenous were weakened by European diseases. But some of the tribes refused to be weakened culturally and politically. Such a tribe was the Pequots.

The Pequots lived in the fertile Connecticut River valley, land that the Puritans wanted. On the pretext of the killing of two English sea captains, one of whom the Puritans themselves hated, they made a punitive expedition into the Pequot territory.

The Puritans demanded the murderers and payment in wampum. For good measure, they took Pequot children as hostages. The Pequot tried to placate the English, but when that didn't work they resisted. The war was evenly matched until the Puritans massacred a Pequot village. In 1638, the Pequot nation was considered dissolved. For the Puritans, steeped in theology that good people receive their rewards on earth, their military victory over the Pequot proved their righteousness.

For the Narragansets, allying with the colonists did not help their survival. When the Puritans wanted Narraganset land, they allied with the Mohegan to have a Narraganset chief killed.

Two years later the Massachusetts Bay Colony helped organize the New England Confederation and mobilized for war against the Narraganset. Rather than fight, the tribe submitted to a treaty that cost them large tracts of land.

Neither friend nor foe of the colonists would survive. What could not be pillaged by war was taken by law. The Puritans passed laws that called for the death penalty for "blasphemy," that is, not accepting the Puritan religion. Colonial courts tried, sentenced, and imprisoned indigenous who "trespassed" on lands that the Puritans claimed.

The Wampanoags who once lived on all the land from Narraganset Bay to Cape Cod by 1675 had a few "tongues of land." Metacom, their chief (the English called him King Philip), rallied twenty thousand indigenous from various tribes to rise up in rebellion.

At the time, however, there were fifty thousands colonists. After initial victories, the sheer numbers of white people proved too powerful.

~ Gary Nash, *Red, White, and Black*, 116-121

Plymouth, 1676: Metacom's War

In the public square stands a tall pole. On top is impaled the head of *the hellhound, fiend, tawney serpent and dog*, who dared to resist becoming a colonized and culturally submissive person. He dared to drive his forces to within twenty miles of Boston in order to stop the religious and political imperialism of the Puritans. Metacom, chief of the Wampanoag, has

mobilized the largest native confederation to resist the onslaught of the whites. His wife and son are now slaves in the West Indies. His head will stay on public display for twenty-five years.

His words will last much longer.

One hundred sixty years later, William Apes will repeat them at the Odeon in Boston.

Brothers—You see this vast country before us, which the Great Spirit gave to our fathers and us; you see the buffalo and the deer that now are our support. Brothers, you see these little ones, our wives and children, who are looking to us for food and raiment; and you now see the foe before you, that they have grown insolent and bold; that all our ancient customs are disregarded; the treaties made by our fathers and us are broken, and all of us insulted; our council fires disregarded, and all the ancients customs of our fathers; our brothers murdered before our eyes, and their spirits cry to us for revenge. Brothers, these people from the unknown world will cut down our groves, spoil our hunting and planting grounds, and drive us and our children from the graves of our fathers, and our council fires, and enslave our women and children.

This would not be the last time a native from this land the Europeans called America would speak words such as these.

~ *Chronicles of American Indian Protest*, 8-11

Northwest Territory, 1763: Pontiac's Speech

It is important for us, my brothers, that we exterminate from our land this nation which only seeks to kill us. You see, as well as I do, that we cannot get our supplies as we had from our brothers, the French. The English sell us merchandise twice dearer than the French... and their wares [are worth] nothing. When I go to the English chief to tell him that some of our comrades are dead, instead of weeping for the dead... he makes fun of me and you... There is no more time to lose, and when the English shall be defeated... we shall cut the passage so that they cannot come back to our country.

~ *Chronicles of American Indian Protest*, 40-41

Northwest Territory, 1812: Tecumseh's Plea for Resistance and Unity

Shawnee chief Tecumseh stands in the Great Council before his Choctaw and Chickasaw brothers. He is trying to convince them to join in a unified resistance against the whites.

The whites are already nearly a match for us all united; and too strong for any one tribe alone to resist; so that unless we support one another with our collected and united forces; unless every tribe unanimously combines to give a check to the ambition and avarice of the whites, they will soon conquer us apart and disunited, and we will be driven away from our native country and scattered as autumnal leaves before the wind...

Every year our white intruders become more greedy, exacting, oppressive, and overbearing. Every year contentions spring up between them and our people and when blood is shed we have to make atonement, whether right or wrong, at the cost of the lives of our greatest chiefs, and the yielding up of large tracts of our lands. Before the pale-faces came among us, we enjoyed the happiness of unbounded freedom, and were acquainted with neither riches, wants, nor oppression. How is it now? Wants and oppression are our lot; for are we not controlled in everything, and dare we move without asking, by your leave?... Do they not even now kick and strike us as they do their black-faces? How long will it be before they will tie us to a post and whip us, and make us work for them in their cornfields as they do them? Shall we wait for that moment or shall we die fighting before submitting to such ignominy? The annihilation of our race is at hand unless we united in one common cause against the common foe...

Will not the bones of our dead be plowed up, and their graves be turned into fields? ... War or extermination are our only choice. Which do you choose, brave Choctaw and Chickasaw, to assist in the just cause of liberating our race from the grasp of our faithless invaders and heartless oppressors? The white usurpation in our common country must be stopped or we, its rightful owners, be forever destroyed and wiped out as a race of people. Then listen to the voice of duty, of honor, of nature, and of your endangered country. Let us form one body, one heart, and defend to the last warrior our country, our homes, our liberty, and the graves of our fathers.

When U.S. agents approach Tecumseh, he breaks the peace pipe saying, A chance such as this will never occur again—for us Indians of North America to form ourselves into one great combination and cast our lot with the British in this war. Tecumseh believes that if the British win the tribes will keep their land, but if the “long knives” (the colonists) win it will not be many years before our last place of abode and our last hunting grounds will be taken from us and the remnants of different tribes... will be driven toward the setting sun.

~ Paul Jacobs and Saul Landau, *To Serve the Devil*, 53-56

*My heart is a stone:
heavy with sadness for my people;
cold with the knowledge that no treaty will keep whites out of our lands;
hard with the determination to resist as long as I live and breathe.*

*Now we are weak and many of our people are afraid.
But hear me:*

a single twig breaks, but the bundle of twigs is strong.

Someday I will embrace our brothers' tribes and draw them into a bundle and together we will win our country back from the whites.

~ Tecumseh, 1795

New Leaders

What has become known as the French and Indian War (1754-1760) ended with the French defeat in Quebec. The English expected the Shawnee, Miami, Kickapoo, Sauk, Potawatomie, Fox, Chippewa, Illinois, Ottawa, and Delaware, who had all allied with the French, to meekly accept the presence of English settlers and traders.

Pontiac

In 1762 an eloquent chief and brilliant military strategist rose to power among the indigenous of the Northwest (what is now Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana). He organized a confederacy of eighteen tribes that seized every British post in the Northwest Territory, except Forts Pitt and Detroit. But even at Fort Detroit they managed to hold a siege for eight months--the longest in American military history.

Chief Pontiac and his Confederacy won from the British the famous Crown Proclamation of October, 1763. The Proclamation set an official line of demarcation running the length of the crest of the Appalachian mountains, separating colonial from indigenous land. The Proclamation even demanded those colonists who had gone across the mountains to remove themselves.

Britain had its own reasons for such an agreement. The Crown wanted to stop the native rebellions but also wanted to limit the expansion of the colonies in order to keep them more dependent on the mother country.

Land speculators, including George Washington, Patrick Henry, and Benjamin Franklin, had already purchased millions of acres in what was "Indian Territory".

~ Chronicles of American Indian Protest, 41-44

Tecumseh and the War of 1812

Both Britain and the United States attempted to gain the Indigenous as allies during the War of 1812.

At the beginning the war went well. Tecumseh rallied tribal unity and his military skill helped to force Fort Detroit to surrender with hardly a fight. More tribes began to join the fight on the side of the British. The Potawatomies captured Fort Dearborn, and the Miamis laid siege to Fort Wayne. Tecumseh even convinced the great Creek nation in the south to join.

A change of British command brought in men who were cowards and hated Indians. Tecumseh was finally killed in battle, protecting the fleeing British troops. Those at the battle recalled seeing him being hit several times, with blood pouring from his mouth and covering his body; yet he was still yelling like a "tiger," urging his braves on.

~ Chronicles of American Indian Protest, 77-81

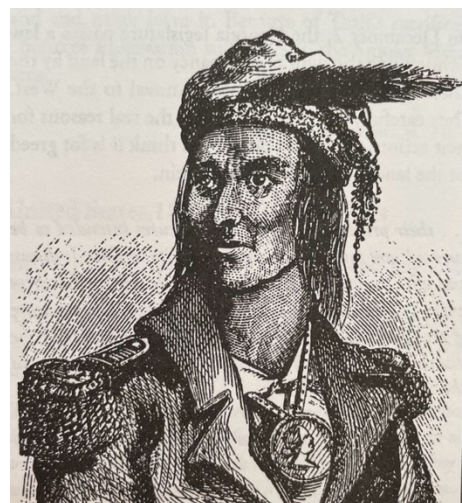
Middle West, 1812: Tecumseh's Way

Tecumseh finds General Procter plying the natives with whiskey and goading them into killing unarmed prisoners. Tecumseh rushes to the scene, sword raised and says, *Are there no men here?* The killing stops. He criticizes General Procter, who only says that Indians cannot be controlled.

You are unfit to command, Tecumseh counters. I conquer to save, and you to murder.

~ Chronicles of American Indian Protest, 79

Tecumseh, which means "shooting star," was known for his humane treatment of enemies. Even though his father and two brothers were killed by whites, Tecumseh never allowed torture or atrocities.



Georgia, 1829: Laws of Conquest

Again, what is too costly to win by armed conflict is taken through laws written by and for the white man without any representation from the people who will suffer. Georgia passes a law that:

1. *Confiscates all Cherokee land to be distributed to white owners.*
2. *Abolishes all authority of the Cherokee government and nullifies all Cherokee laws.*
3. *Prohibits any gathering of Cherokee people, even for religious purposes.*
4. *Makes it a crime, punishable by imprisonment, for any Cherokee to advise another not to emigrate.*
5. *Declares void any contract between Indians and whites unless witnessed by two white men.*
6. *Refuses the right of any Cherokee to testify in court against any white man.*
7. *Specifically prohibits any Cherokee to dig gold in the Cherokee gold fields.*

~ Chronicles of American Indian Protest, 113-114

Georgia, 1835: Preamble to Robbery

On December 2, the Georgia legislature passes a law withdrawing the right of occupancy on the land by the Cherokees and requiring their removal to the West.

They carefully tell in the preamble the real reasons for their actions so that no one would think it is for greed for the land or hatred of the red skin.

...their primary object in the measures intended to be pursued, are founded on real humanity to these Indians, and with a view, in a distant region, to perpetuate them with their old identity of character, under the paternal care of the government of the United States; at the same time disavowing any selfish or sinister motives towards them in their present legislation.

~ Chronicles of American Indian Protest, 120

Cherokee Trail of Tears



When the Europeans arrived in the Western Hemisphere the Cherokee were a free people and a sovereign nation. Both the English and the French wanted to make alliances with this nation for protection and benefit. The United States recognized its sovereignty in 1785 and 1791, guaranteeing that land not ceded then would remain in Cherokee hands. Whites could not even hunt on Cherokee lands, according to the agreements.

In 1721, South Carolina made a treaty with the Cherokee, the first cession of Cherokee lands.

The process was to be repeated so often that by 1835 the Cherokee had concluded more treaties with the United States than any other tribe. Almost without exception every treaty stated that it would be the last one. Treaties contained impressive promises: "The United States solemnly guarantees to the Cherokee Nation, all their lands not hereby ceded"; this treaty will stand "as long as the grass grows and the rivers flow." Each treaty stole more from the original land until the Cherokee government finally passed a law making it a capital offense for any tribal member to cede land to the U.S. government.

One of the main ideological arguments used by the Europeans to take the land was that the indigenous were savages and roamed the land as hunters rather than "settling down" and farming the land as "civilized people" do. The Cherokee, however, adapted to many European customs, hoping to maintain their lands not by warfare but through accommodation.

By the 1820', the Cherokee had their own written languages and a bilingual newspaper published in English and Cherokee. They had a constitutional government and an elaborate judicial system.

Some of them had accumulated considerable wealth and were living on large farms with spacious homes.

The discovery of gold in 1828 in Georgia sent hordes of fortune seekers into Cherokee territory. That same year the Indian fighter Andrew Jackson campaigned on a platform of removal on the Indians to west of the Mississippi. After Jackson became president, Congress granted him power to negotiate treaties that exchanged land in what is now Oklahoma for their original Smoky Mountain land.

Before a treaty was made, Georgia divided up the Cherokee lands and gave it by lottery to whites. Even improved property with houses and barns, cultivated fields, mills, gardens, and orchards was simply given to whites.

On December 29, 1835, a few Cherokee without authority signed the Treaty of New Echota which ceded the remaining territory east of the Mississippi. Chief John Ross, who had recently been released from prison in Georgia, collected over fifteen thousand Cherokee signatures denouncing the treaty as a fraud. In spite of this, and in spite of the fact that it was quite evident that the Cherokee had made it a capital offense to cede territory in order to stop just such a trick, Congress ratified the treaty and gave the Cherokee two years to move.

From 1825, until the moment of their removal, the Cherokee constantly and peacefully petitioned the U.S. government for justice. They sent representatives to the president and to Congress. They testified before committees, passed their own laws, signed petitions, and developed their own constitution. Their bilingual newspaper the *Cherokee Phoenix* clearly spelled out Cherokee objections to the removal policy. All to no avail.

In 1838, the newly elected president, Martin Van Buren, stated: "No State can achieve proper culture, civilization, and progress in safety as long as Indians are permitted to remain." So the Cherokee were to be forcibly removed—the bilingual Cherokee whose language was so complex that professional ethnologists at the time could not figure out how it was written.

The Cherokee Sequoyah invented an alphabet of eighty-five characters so accurately expressing the roots of the language that any Cherokee could learn to read and write in a few days. The Cherokee rate of literacy was higher than that of the "white rabble" coming to take their lands in the name of "civilization."

In June of 1838, the Train of Tears began as seven thousand troops marched the Cherokee to concentration camps while the whites looted their houses, burned their crops, and drove off their livestock.

~ See *Cherokee Heritage*

Smoky Mountains, 1838: Tsali's Sacrifice

Hundreds of Cherokee, under the leadership of Chief Utsala, refuse to be removed and flee to the mountains. An aging Cherokee, named Tsali, and his family are one of the groups of resistance.

General Scott sends mounted troops to round up the fugitives. They surround Tsali and his family, who surrender. As they are being led to the stockade, one of the soldiers pushes Tsali's wife sharply with his bayonet. Already embittered by the forced removal, Tsali can't bear this last bit of injustice. He tears the weapon away from the soldier and kills him. The rest of the family helps subdue the others, killing a second soldier and wounding a third. Tsali and his family flee to the mountains.

General Scott feels that the "National Honor" is at stake and that the "murderers" have to be punished. Given the rugged terrain, the troops cannot find Tsali or the other hundreds of resisters. So Scott sends word that if Tsali and his sons surrender, thousands of other Cherokee can remain on their land. Knowing the consequences, Tsali and his family surrender.

After a speedy trial, Tsali and his sons are sentenced to death. Facing the firing squad, Tsali's youngest son, Wasidani, is spared at the last minute because of his youth. Before being killed, Tsali tells his son to love the land never leave it. Because of Tsali's sacrifice, a Cherokee Reservation still exists in the Smoky Mountains.

~ See *Cherokee Heritage*, 115-116

The United States, 1838-39: Trail of Tears

Private John G. Burnett is with the Second Regiment, Second Brigade of the mounted infantry ordered to remove the Cherokees from their land. On his eightieth birthday he records the following for his children, for all children.

The removal of Cherokee Indians from their life long homes in the year of 1838 found me a young man in the prime of life and a Private soldier in the American Army. Being acquainted with many of the Indians and able to fluently speak their language, I was sent as interpreter into the Smoky Mountain Country in May, 1838, and witnessed the execution of the most brutal order in the History of American Warfare. I saw the helpless Cherokees arrested and dragged from their homes, and driven at the bayonet point into the stockades. And in the chill of a drizzling rain on an October morning I saw them loaded like cattle or sheep into six hundred and forty-five wagons and started toward the West.

One can never forget the sadness and solemnity of that morning... Chief John Ross led in prayer and when the bugle sounded and the wagons started rolling many of the children rose to their feet and waved their little hands good-by to their mountain homes, knowing they were leaving them forever. Many of these helpless people did not have blankets and many of them had been driven from home barefooted.

On the morning of November the 17th we encountered a terrific sleet and snow storm with freezing temperatures and from that day until we reached the end of the fateful journey on March the 26th, 1839, the sufferings of the Cherokees were awful. The trail of the exiles was a trail of death. They had to sleep in the wagons and on the ground without fire. And I have known as many as twenty-two of them to die in one night of pneumonia due to ill treatment, cold, and exposure. Among this number was the beautiful Christian wife of Chief John Ross. This noble hearted woman died a martyr to childhood, giving her only blanket for the protection of a sick child. She rode thinly clad through a blinding sleet and snow storm, developed pneumonia and died in the still hours of a bleak winter night, with her head resting on Lieutenant Gregg's saddle blanket...

I made the long journey to the west with the Cherokees and did all that a Private soldier could do to alleviate their sufferings. When on guard duty at night I have many times walked my beat in my blouse in order that some sick child might have the warmth of my overcoat. I was on guard duty the night Mrs. Ross died. When relieved at midnight I did not retire, but remained around the wagon out of sympathy for Chief Ross, and at daylight was detailed by Captain McClellan to assist in the burial like the other unfortunates who died on the way. Her unconfined body was buried in a shallow grave by the roadside far from her native home, and the sorrowing Cavalcade moved on.

Being a young man, I mingled freely with the young women and girls. I have spent many pleasant hours with them when I was supposed to be under my blanket, and they have many times sung their mountain songs for me, this being all that they could do to repay my kindness. And with all my association with Indian girls from October 1829 to March 26th 1839, I did not meet one who was a moral prostitute. They are kind and tender hearted and many of them are beautiful.

The only trouble that I had with anybody on the entire journey to the west was a brutal teamster by the name of Ben McDonal, who was using his whip on an old feeble Cherokee to hasten him into the wagon. The sight of that old and nearly blind creature quivering under the lashes of a bull whip was too much for me. I attempted to stop McDonal and it ended in a personal encounter. He lashed me across the face, the wire tip on his whip cutting a bad gash in my cheek. The little hatchet that I had carried in my hunting days was in my belt and McDonal was carried unconscious from the scene.

I was placed under guard but Ensign Henry Bullock and Private Elkanah Millard had both witnessed the encounter. They gave Captain McClellan the facts and I was never brought to trial. Years later I met 2nd Lieutenant Riley and Ensign Bullock at Bristol at John Roberson's

show, and Bullock jokingly reminded me that there was a case still pending against me before a court martial and wanted to know how much longer I was going to have the trial put off? McDonal finally recovered, and in the year 1851, was running a boat out of Memphis, Tennessee.

The long painful journey to the west ended March 26th, 1839, with four-thousand silent graves reaching from the foothills of the Smoky Mountains to what is known as Indian territory in the West. And covetousness on the part of the white race was the cause of all that the Cherokees had to suffer. Ever since Ferdinand DeSoto made his journey through the Indian country in the year 1540, there had been a tradition of a rich gold mine somewhere in the Smoky Mountain Country, and I think the tradition was true. At a festival at Echota on Christmas night 1829, I danced and played with Indian girls who were wearing ornaments around their neck that looked like gold.

In the year 1828, a little Indian boy living on Ward creek had sold a gold nugget to a white trader, and that nugget sealed the doom of the Cherokees. In a short time the country was overrun with armed brigands claiming to be government agents, who paid no attention to the rights of the Indians who were the legal possessors of the country. Crimes were committed that were a disgrace to civilization. Men were shot in cold blood, lands were confiscated. Homes were burned and the inhabitants driven out by the gold-hungry brigands.

Chief Junaluska was personally acquainted with President Andrew Jackson. Junaluska had taken 500 of the flower of his Cherokee scouts and helped Jackson to win the battle of the Horse Shoe, leaving 33 of them dead on the field. And in that battle Junaluska had drove his tomahawk through the skull of a Creek warrior, when the Creek had Jackson at his mercy.

Chief John Ross sent Junaluska as an envoy to plead with President Jackson for protection for his people, but Jackson's manner was cold and indifferent toward the rugged son of the forest who had saved his life. He met Junaluska, heard his plea but curtly said, "Sir, your audience is ended. There is nothing I can do for you." The doom of the Cherokee was sealed. Washington, D.C., had decreed that they must be driven West and their lands given to the white man, and in May 1838, an army of 4000 regulars, and 3000 volunteer soldiers under command of General Winfield Scott, marched into the Indian country and wrote the blackest chapter on the pages of American history.

Men working in the fields were arrested and driven to the stockades. Women were dragged from their homes by soldiers whose language they could not understand. Children were often separated from their parents and driven into the stockades with the sky for a blanket and the earth for a pillow. And often the old and infirm were prodded with bayonets to hasten them to the stockades.

In one home death had come during the night. A little sad-faced child had died and was lying on a bear skin couch and some women were preparing the little body for burial. All were arrested and driven out leaving the child in the cabin. I don't know who buried the body.

In another home was a frail mother, apparently a widow and three small children, one just a baby. When told that she must go, the mother gathered the children at her feet, prayed a humble prayer in her native tongue, patted the old family dog on the head, told the faithful creature good-by, with a baby strapped on her back and leading a child with each hand started on her exile. But the task was too great for that frail mother. A stroke of heart failure relieved her sufferings. She sunk and died with her baby on her back, and her other two children clinging to her hands.

Chief Junaluska who had saved President Jackson's life at the battle of Horse Shoe witnessed this scene, the tears gushing down his cheeks and lifting his cap he turned his face toward the heavens and said, "Oh my God, if I had known at the battle of the Horse Shoe what I know now, American history would have been differently written."

At this time, 1890, we are too near the removal of the Cherokees for our young people to fully understand the enormity of the crime that was committed against a helpless race. Truth is, the facts are being concealed from the young people of today. School children of today do not know that we are living on lands that were taken from a helpless race at the bayonet point to satisfy the white man's greed.

Future generations will read and condemn the act and I do hope posterity will remember that private soldiers like myself, and like the four Cherokees who were forced by General Scott to shoot an Indian Chief and his children, had to execute the orders of our superiors. We had no choice in the matter.

Twenty-five years after the removal it was my privilege to meet a large company of the Cherokees in uniform of the Confederate Army under command of Colonel Thomas. They were encamped at Zollicoffer and I went to see them. Most of them were just boys at the time of the removal but they instantly recognized me as "the soldier that was good to us". Being able to talk to them in their native language I had an enjoyable day with them. From them I learned that Chief John Ross was still ruler in the nation in 1863. And I wonder if he is still living? He was a noble-hearted fellow and suffered a lot for his race.

At one time, he was arrested and thrown into a dirty jail in an effort to break his spirit, but he remained true to his people and led them in prayer when they started on their exile. And his Christian wife sacrificed her life for a little girl who had pneumonia. The Anglo-Saxon race would build a towering monument to perpetuate her noble act in giving her only blanket for comfort of a sick child. Incidentally the child recovered, but Mrs. Ross is sleeping in a unmarked grave far from her native Smoky Mountain home.

When Scott invaded the Indian country some of the Cherokees fled to caves and dens in the mountains and were never captured and they are there today. I have long intended going there and trying to find them but I have put off going from year to year and now I am too feeble to

ride that far. The fleeing years have come and gone and old age has overtaken me. I can truthfully say that neither my rifle nor my knife were stained with Cherokee blood.

I can truthfully say that I did my best for them when they certainly did need a friend. Twenty-five years after the removal I still lived in their memory as "the soldier that was good to us". However, murder is murder whether committed by the villain skulking in the dark or by uniformed men stepping to the strains of martial music.

Murder is murder, and somebody must answer. Somebody must explain the streams of blood that flowed in the Indian country in the summer of 1838. Somebody must explain the 4000 silent graves that mark the trail of the Cherokees to their exile. I wish I could forget it all, but the picture of 645 wagons lumbering over the frozen ground with their cargo of suffering humanity still lingers in my memory.

Let the historian of a future day tell the sad story with its sighs, its tears and dying groans. Let the great Judge of all the earth weigh our actions and reward us according to our work.

Children - Thus ends my promised birthday story. This December the 11th 1890.

~ Cherokee Legends and the Trail of Tears, 21-27

The Cheyennes Fight Back

Back in 1851, the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Sioux, Crow, and other tribes met with U.S. representatives at Fort Laramie. The United States wanted access to indigenous lands for roads, forts, and telegraph lines. The tribes granted the access, while not giving up their right to fish, hunt, or roam over the same lands.

Gold had been discovered in California in 1848, and again in the Colorado Territory ten years later. Thousands of miners came to Pikes Peak, building the village of Denver City in the process.

In 1860, the United States was on the brink of a civil war. The war slowed down the westward march of the whites, but did not stop it. That same year the first pony express rider reached California. The U.S. Congress also passed the Pre-emption Bill, which provided free land to settlers in western territories. Before the year was out a man named Spencer invented the repeating rifle.

In 1864, Black Kettle, a Cheyenne chief, heard of white soldiers killing Cheyenne without provocation. Black Kettle wanted "to be peaceable and friendly and keep my tribe so." He always camped under the American flag that Colonel Greenwood had given him for protection.

The cavalry raids continued. Officers under the command of Colonel Chivington were ordered to “kill Cheyenne whenever and wherever found.” Clashes increased and the younger Cheyenne leaders, members of the Hotamitanio, or Dog Soldier Society, wanted to fight back.

After the Sand Creek Massacre the Cheyenne and the Sioux united to keep the whites out of the Powder River country. They called themselves The People, the last hope to save their ancestral hunting grounds. They were led by Red Cloud, Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, Dull Knife, and Roman Nose.

In the summer of 1865, a few months after the end of the Civil War, General Patrick Connor invaded the Powder River territory with four columns of troops. Conner built a fort and named it after himself; later it would be called Fort Reno.

Connor in 1863, had surrounded a camp of Paiute and massacred 278 of them. On this mission he was heard to say that the Indians had to “be hunted like wolves.” His orders to his men: “Attack and kill every male Indian over twelve years of age.” Conner’s goal was to open up the Bozeman Trail to give the whites more roads to the West.

Red Cloud and the other chiefs were angry because the whites had not asked permission to build forts and more roads through their country. That summer, the Sioux and Cheyenne killed hundreds of soldiers and cost the U.S. government millions of dollars. It was one of the worst military defeats at the hands of the Indigenous up to that time.

The next spring (1866) the whites wanted to talk peace. While Red Cloud and the others were negotiating, an army troop arrived at the fort with orders to build forts up and down the Bozeman Trail with or without treaties. Red Cloud denounced the peace commission and stormed out, taking everyone with him.

A guerrilla war followed. Crazy Horse developed a tactic of luring soldiers out of their defensive positions and into ambushes. It took great riding skill and courage, and earned him high respect from his comrades. The greatest victory was at Fort Phil Kearny, where Crazy Horse drew the soldiers from the fort and the combined forces of the Sioux and Cheyenne annihilated them.

Finally in 1868 the army gave up. Even General Sherman, who had led the Union march to the sea, could not subdue the Sioux and Cheyenne warriors. The United States agreed to abandon the forts. Red Cloud, not trusting the whites, replied that he would not sign a peace treaty until the forts were actually abandoned. As the troops left, the warriors set fire to the forts. Red Cloud still waited to sign, worrying the whites even more. It was one of the few treaties whose terms were dictated by the indigenous.

Fort Lyon, 1864: Black Kettle Attempts Peace

"To tame a savage you must tie him down to the soil. You must make him understand the value of property, and the benefits of its separate ownership"

~ U.S. Secretary of the Interior, 1851

One-Eye and Eagle Head, messengers from Black Kettle, approach Fort Lyon. Three soldiers stop them and take firing positions. Quickly the two Cheyenne make hand signals of peace and show a letter from Black Kettle. The soldiers take them prisoner and turn them over to Major Edward W. Wynkoop. In his mid-twenties, with only one battle against the confederates under his belt, he is both afraid and suspicious. The letter says that Black Kettle wants the soldiers to come out to the Smoky Hill camp and wide th two thousand Cheyenne into the reservation, Suspecting a trap, Wynkoop delays a decision. Finally he decides to go.

Releasing the two prisoners, he tells them they are both guides and hostages. *At the first sign of treachery from your people, I will kill you.*

The Cheyennes do not break their word. If they do so I should not care to live longer, replies One-Eye.

On the march Wynkoop has the opportunity to have long conversations wiht the two Cheyenne. Later he writes:

I felt myself in the presence of superior beings; and these were the representatives of a race that i had heretofore looked upon without exception as being cruel, treacherous, and bloodthirsty, without feeling of affection for friend or kindred.

Black Kettle and the other chiefs hold a council with Wynkoop, telling him of the raids committed against their people. Wynkoop, promises to do everything possible to stop the fighting and takes the chiefs to Denver to meet the governor of the Colorado territory and Colonel Chivington.

At Denver, Governor Evans privately tells Wynkoop, *I want no peace till the Indians suffer more. But wha shall I do with the Third Colorado Regiment if I make peace? They have been raised to kill Indians and they must kill Indians.* Unknown to Wynkoop was Colonel Chivington's recent order to his soldiers: *Kill all the Indians you come across.*

Because of his friendly attitude toward the indigenous, U.S. military officials replace Major Wynkoop with Major Scott Anthony as the comandar of Fort Lyon.

In late November, Colonel Chivington and his troops ride into Fort Lyon. In the officers' quarters, Anthony greets him warmly and Chivington talks of *collecting scalps* and *wading in gore*. Anthony is pleased, since he has been waiting for an opportunity to *pitch into them*.

The next day Lieutenant Cramer and a few other protest going out to Black Kettle's peaceful camp where their safety has been guaranteed. *It would be murder in every sense of the word.*

Chivington becomes violent, angrily slams his fist close to Lieutenant Cramer's head, and says, *Damn any man who sympathizes with Indians! I have come to kill Indians, and believe it is right and honorable to use any means under God's heaven to kill them.*

On the evening of November 28, Colonel Chivington and seven hundred men head out to Cheyenne encampment in a horseshoe bend of Sand Creek.

~ Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 56-70

One does not sell the earth upon which the people walk.

~ Crazy Hors

Sand Creek, 1864: American Flag, Native Blood

Colonel Chivington orders Robert Bent, a twenty-four-year-old guide and interpreter from Fort Lyon to accompany his soldiers. Bent gives his version of the events at Sand Creek:

The command consisted of from nine hundred to one thousand men... We left Fort Lyon... and came on to the Indian camp at daylight the next morning. Colonel Chivington surrounded the village with his troops. When we came in sight of the camp I saw the American flag waving and heard Black Kettle tell the Indians to stand around the flag, and there they were huddled—men, women and children...[I] also saw a white flag raised. These flags were in so conspicuous a position that they must have been seen. When the troops fired, the Indians ran...I think there were six hundred Indians in all... thirty-five braves and some old men, about sixty in all. All fought well... I saw five squaws under a bank for shelter. When the troops came up to them they ran out and showed their person to let the soldiers know that they were squaws and begged for mercy, but the soldiers shot them all. There seemed to be the indiscriminate slaughter of men, women, and children. There were some thirty or forty squaws collected in a hole for protection; they sent out a little girl about six years old with a white flag on a stick; she had not proceeded but a few steps when she was shot and killed. All the squaws in that hole were afterwards killed.

Every one I saw dead was scalped. I saw one squaw cut open with an unborn child lying by her side. I saw the body of White Antelope with the privates cut off, and I heard a soldier say he was

going to make a tobacco pouch out of them... I saw a little girl about five years of age who had been hid in the sand; two soldiers discovered her, drew their pistols and shot her, and then pulled her out of the sand by the arm. I saw quite a number of infants in arms killed with their mothers.

~ Chronicles of American Indian Protest, 206-208.

Fort Laramie, 1868: Red Cloud's Victory

It has been two years of resistance and now the whites will have to listen to Red Cloud and Bear Tooth and the others dictate the terms of peace. It is November 6. Red Cloud is surrounded by a small group of triumphant warriors. He has lived up to the message he sent to General Sherman a year before:

The Great Father sent his soldiers out here to spill blood. I did not first commence the spilling of blood... If the Great Father kept white men out of my country, peace would last forever, but if they disturb me there will be no peace... The Great Spirit raised me in this land, and has raised you in another land. What I have said I mean. I mean to keep this land.

~ Dee Brown, Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee, 116

War for Paha Sapa (Black Hills)

In 1872, rumors abounded that there was gold in the Black Hills. Miners, wagon trains, and cavalry led by General George Armstrong Custer beat a trail known as Thieves' Road to the area. Custer was also known as Squaw Killer because of his massacre of Black Kettle and his people on the Washita river in 1868.

Paha Sapa was sacred to the indigenous people. In the summer they went there to commune with the Great Spirit and seek visions. This was the center of the world, the point from which the hoop of the world bent in four directions.

Just four years before, in the Treaty of 1868, that land had been given to the Sioux forever. Now the government tried to get the Black Hills through treaty, but the Sioux refused. The Peace Commissioners then recommended that Congress decide on a "fair equivalent value" and present it to the Indians as "finality."

The United States offered the Sioux six million dollars for the Black Hills. The Sioux rejected the offer for good reason: just one Black Hills mine would eventually yield five hundred million

dollars. By February 1876, the War Department authorized General Sheridan to begin military actions against the “hostile Sioux,” including Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse.

Crazy Horse joined forces with Sitting Bull; they made their camps on the banks of the Little Big Horn. There were ten thousand people with three to four thousand warriors, their camps spreading for three miles. On June 24, 1876 General George Armstrong Custer came looking for the Sioux. He had split his forces into three columns. The Sioux, defending their women and children along the Little Big Horn, wiped out Custer and over 180 of his men. It was the worst military defeat that the U.S. government had ever suffered in the wars with the native peoples.

The whites viewed the defeat as a massacre. More soldiers hunted down the Sioux. For over a year Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse kept the soldiers at bay. Finally, Sitting Bull took his people to Canada while Crazy Horse continued to fight. In 1877, after a long winter, the United States offered Crazy Horse and his people a reservation in the Powder River country, the most precious of territory to the Sioux. Crazy Horse brought his people to the fort and waited for the promised territory. After four months he decided to take the land and marches his people to the Powder River.

Eight companies of soldiers rode out and arrested him. During the arrest procedure, Crazy Horse balked at the prison cell after he saw men in chains. Glad for an excuse to kill him, one of the soldiers ran his bayonet through Crazy Horse’s stomach.

The Sioux mourned his death for weeks. His parents finally took his bones and heart and buried them in a desolate spot on their trek to Canada, near a creek called Wounded Knee. The U.S. military had never defeated Crazy Horse in battle.

More and more whites flooded into Sioux and Cheyenne territory, and the U.S. government tried to wrest more and more land from the tribes. In 1889, they “legally” stole land out in the middle of the Sioux reservation. The state was set for the end of the frontier and the way of life the native populations had known for millennia.

That end came in 1890 at Wounded Knee. It was the final large-scale military massacre committed by the whites against the indigenous. Many more deaths of native peoples would follow due to poverty, despair, injustice, but not until the 1970s would the big guns again be fired on the Sioux.

Washington D.C., 1889: Erasing Dangerous Memory



Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, Indian boarding school, 1893

The Commissioner of Indian Affairs issues a set of instructions to all Indian agents concerning how to train Indians as American citizens and inculcate in them a sense of patriotism.

It is in the highest degree important, therefore, that special attention should be paid, particularly in the higher grades of the school, to the instruction of Indian youth in the elements of American history, acquainting them especially with the leading facts in the lives of the most notable and worthy historical characters. While in such study the wrongs of their ancestors cannot be ignored, the injustice which their race has suffered can be contrasted with the larger future open to them, and their duties and opportunities rather than their wrongs will most profitably engage their attention...

They [teachers] should point out to their pupils the provisions which the Government has made for their education... and should endeavor to awaken reverence for the nation's power, gratitude for its beneficence, pride in its history, and a laudable ambition to contribute to its posterity.

~ Francis Paul Prucha, ed., *Documents of United States Indian Policy*, 180-181

The Wild West, 1885: Sitting Bull



Sitting Bull with Wild Bill Cody

Sitting Bull is the symbol of native resistance. He continually defends his culture from white attack. He is the leader who subjected the U.S. Army to its worst defeat in the “Indian Wars.”

He joins the Buffalo Bill Cody Wild West Show. Although he is greeted by boos and catcalls, by the end of the show he has won them over, and they pay him for autographed pictures. But Sitting Bull is poor, he saves nothing of what he earns. He is continually pressing coins into the hands of the ragged and hungry white kids who seem to be at every stop on the circuit.

As a Sioux chief he is responsible for the welfare of his people, which means giving away what he has so that no one will go hungry. He cannot understand how white people can neglect their poor.

He tells Annie Oakley: *The white man knows how to make everything, but he does not know how to distribute it.*

~ Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 338

Pine Ridge Reservation, 1890: Ghost Dance

This generation of Sioux are seeing the end of life as their ancestors knew it! The buffalo and antelope herds are gone. The life of roaming and hunting is as dead as the thousands of warriors buried beneath the white man’s railroads and mines and corn fields. In the midst of this ending rises a new beginning—a religious ferment called the ghost dance. A Paiute named Wovoka claims to be the Messiah. He prophesies that by next spring all the whites will be gone and in their place new sweet grass will sprout and all the natives who have ever lived will return to life. The people grasp at this hope and begin to dance the ghost dance in larger and larger numbers. The whites are afraid and they call out the army for protection. The army decides that Sitting Bull is behind this ghost dance phenomenon, even though he is not. They send forty-three Indian policemen to arrest him. In the ensuing melee Sitting Bull is shot.

~ Bill Zimmerman, *Airlift to Wounded Knee*, 46-47

Wounded Knee, 1890: The Sacred Hoop is Broken

Between 1870 and 1890, the number of buffalo on the Great Plains dropped from fifty million to eight hundred.

~ Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*

Big Foot, hearing about Sitting Bull's death, begins to move his tribe to the Pine Ridge Reservation for safety. The tribe has grown because many homeless widows have joined it recently. It is December, cold and snowing. They meet the Seventh Cavalry, Custer's old outfit, who order them to camp at the place called Wounded Knee. Sleeping on both sides that night are survivors from the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Over the Minneconjou Sioux camp flies the white flag. When they awake the next morning the Seventh Cavalry has them surrounded and there are four Hotchkiss guns peering down from a nearby hill. The Minneconjou surrender their weapons and place them in the center of the camp. Not satisfied, the troops search for more and find two rifles. In the ensuing confiscation, a gun goes off. Suddenly an explosion cracks through the shallow valley. The troops open fire. Within seconds dozens of unarmed Sioux are dead. Defenseless, many of the Sioux try to flee. The big Hotchkiss guns open fire.

Shells tear through the camp at the rate of almost one a second, shredding tepees and human flesh. Flying shrapnel does not discriminate between men, women, and children. We tried to run but they shot us like we were buffalo. Some say the Seventh Cavalry killed three hundred. One hundred fifty-three bodies are found soon afterward on the site. Many more crawl off to die in the snow. Twenty-five soldiers are killed, mostly by their own bullets or shrapnel.

A few hours later Black Elk, a leading Oglala Sioux medicine man, arrives to find many bodies, including that of Big Foot, frozen into grotesque shapes. Decades later Black Elk describes what he saw:

I did not know then how much was ended. When I look back now from this high hill of my old age, I can still see the butchered women and children lying heaped and scattered all along the crooked gulch as plain as when I saw them with eyes still young. And I can see that something else died there in the bloody mud, and was buried in the blizzard. A people's dream died there. It was a beautiful dream...

The nation's hoop is broken and scattered.. There is no center any longer, and the sacred tree is dead.

Wagonloads of wounded Sioux, mostly women and children, reach Pine Ridge reservation after dark. The army leaves in the open cold for hours because the army is living in the barracks. Finally the Episcopal Church offers to take them in. It is December 29; Christmas decorations still adorn the church. Just above the pulpit is a crudely lettered banner:

PEACE ON EARTH, GOOD WILL TO MEN

Eighteen U.S. cavalrymen receive the Congressional Medal of Honor for their actions at Wounded Knee. The United States is two years shy of the four hundredth anniversary of Columbus' invasion: four hundred years of a massive assault by mostly white Europeans against the forests, animals, and people that have lived there for millennia; four hundred years of constant resistance as the native peoples defend their lives, culture, and land. It takes four hundred years to break the sacred hoop.

~ Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 351; Bill Zimmerman, *Airlift to Wounded Knee*,

48

Pine Ridge Reservation, 1925: Why They Rebel, Part I

At seven, Gladys Spotted Bear enrolls in the Holy Rosary Mission School. The teachers beat her if she and her classmates speak their native Lakota language. Converted to Catholicism, she speaks English and prays in Latin. The school makes a conscious effort to destroy the Sioux culture, including their clothing, hair length, skin color, and, of course, religion.

The children perform badly when asked to raise their hands and give the correct answer. None of the children want to be first because they do not want any of their classmates to look less intelligent. The school teaches them that this sort of cooperation is bad and that they should compete with one another.

As Gladys gets older, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, (BIA) launches a campaign to wipe out her native religion. The BIA forbids the Sioux to perform ceremonies like the Potlatch (where all or most of one's possessions are given away to other people in the tribe) and the Sun Dance.

When Gladys is sixteen, the U.S. government decides that the way tribes are organized is wrong. Indian leaders should be elected by ballot, the way the whites do it. For centuries the Sioux and other tribes have been organized in kinship groupings. The chief has as much power as the people allow him to have, given his wisdom, courage, and persuasive power. The Indian Reorganization Act changes all that. The United States government presents each reservation with a model pre-packaged constitution and removes tribal chiefs from power.

~ Bill Zimmerman, *Airlift to Wounded Knee*, 58-59

Reservations and Renewed Resistance

The reservation system, set up by the U.S. government, destroyed the native people. The Bureau of Indian Affairs institutionalized the theft and manipulation of native land and systematically stripped the native peoples of their culture, religion, language, and way of governance. Mission schools specifically saw their purpose as “civilizing” and “Christianizing” the children and making them patriotic U.S. citizens.

Decades of this system led in the 1970s to an eruption of protests and demonstrations on the part of the native people and their allies to reclaim the civil and human rights and economic development that the United States took from them. Takeovers at Alcatraz and Wounded Knee galvanized native peoples into a new resistance struggle. The ecological awakening during that period, continuing until today, sparked a renewed interest in the indigenous way of life, including their culture, religion, and view of the earth.

On November 9, 1969, seventy-eight native people made a predawn landing on Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay. The takeover was extraordinarily dramatic and focused world attention on Indian protest. By November 30, nearly six hundred Indians, representing more than fifty tribes, were living on the island. Their numbers decreased drastically in later months, as the U.S. government cut off telephones, electricity, and water in the hope that they would leave altogether. But the Indians were unyielding. They incorporated themselves as Indians of All Tribes and remained until they were forcefully removed a year and a half later.

~ *Chronicles of American Indian Protest*, 310; Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, 226-233; Bill Zimmerman, *Airlift to Wounded Knee*, 42-48

San Francisco, 1969: Alcatraz Reclaimed

Proclamation: To the Great White Father and All His People

We, the Native Americans, reclaim the land known as Alcatraz Island in the name of the American Indians by right of discovery. We wish to be fair and honorable in our dealings with the Caucasian inhabitants of this land, and hereby offer the following treaty:

- *We will purchase said Alcatraz Island for twenty-four dollars (\$24) in glass beads and red cloth, a precedent set by the white man’s purchase of a similar island about 300 years ago. We know that \$24 in trade goods for these 16 acres is more than was paid when Manhattan Island was sold but we know that land values have risen over the years. Our offer of \$1.24 per acre is greater than the 47 cents per acre the white men are now paying the California Indians for their land.*

- *We will give to the inhabitants of this island a portion of the land for their own to be held in trust by the American Indian Affairs and by the bureau of Caucasian Affairs to hold in perpetuity—for as long as the sun shall rise and the rivers go down to the sea. We will further guide the inhabitants in the proper way of living. We will offer them our religion, our education, our life-ways, in order to help them achieve our level of civilization and thus raise them and all their white brothers up from their savage and unhappy state. We offer this treaty in good faith and wish to be fair and honorable in our dealings with all white men.*

We feel this so-called Alcatraz Island is more than suitable for an Indian reservation, as determined by the white man's own standards. By this we mean that this place resembles most Indian reservations in that:

1. *It is isolated from modern facilities, and without adequate means of transportation.*
2. *It has not fresh running water.*
3. *It has inadequate sanitation facilities.*
4. *There are no oil or mineral rights.*
5. *There is no industry and so unemployment is very great.*
6. *There are no health care facilities.*
7. *The soil is rocky and nonproductive; and the land does not support game.*
8. *There are no educational facilities.*
9. *The population has always exceeded the land base.*
10. *The population has always been held as prisoners and kept dependent on others.*

Further, it would be fitting and symbolic that ships from all over the world, entering the Golden Gate, would first see Indian land, and thus be reminded of the true history of this nation. This tiny island would be a symbol of the great lands once ruled by free and noble Indians.

~ Chronicles of American Indian Protest, 310-311

Pine Ridge Reservation, 1973: Why they Rebel, Part II

Twelve thousand Sioux live on the reservation. Sixty percent are unemployed and only nine percent of the homes has electricity. A few people are living in chicken coops and in the shells of abandoned cars. The rest live in one- and two-room tar-papered shacks. Occasionally someone freezes to death. The Federal Trade Commission's latest study shows that prices at the trading post are twenty-seven percent higher than the national average.

The infant mortality rate is four times the national average and life expectancy is only forty-four and a half years. The suicide rate is five times the national average and Sioux teenagers are killing themselves at fifteen times the rate of their counterparts in the rest of the country.

While the land is parceled out to individual Sioux, they do not actually own it. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) holds it in trust for them. The BIA, instead of serving the Sioux, helps local white ranchers buy and lease land for their own profit.

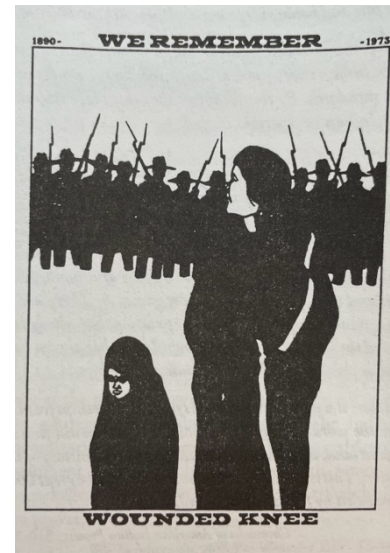
The reservation is like a ghetto on the plains.

~ Bill Zimmerman, *Airlift to Wounded Knee*, 60-63

Poster from Akwesasne
Notes of the Mohawk Nation commemorating the history of native oppression and struggle.

Pine Ridge Reservation, 1973: Occupation of Wounded Knee

In the last election for tribal chairman, Richard Wilson was elected. Less than fifty percent of the people voted. They now want to impeach him, but Wilson postpones his own hearing. In the meantime, an exchange of ugly remarks in a white bar leads to a fight between a Sioux and the whites. The Sioux is struck from behind with a beer bottle. When the police arrive they arrest the Sioux; when other Sioux hear about this they tear apart four other white bars that have a reputation for being abusive to natives. The police arbitrarily arrest forty Sioux, and the people protest.



In this highly charged atmosphere, Sioux leaders ask members of a new organization called the American Indian Movement (AIM) to come onto the reservation and help publicize the situation. AIM is dedicated to reclaiming the civil rights of the native populations and see that the government upholds its past treaty obligations.

The police openly ride around with shotguns in their cars, and vigilante groups form. Dennis Banks and Russell Means, two AIM leaders, promise that they will give the people the protection they need and will help to bring the situation to the attention of the U.S. government.

One of their first actions is to form a caravan of sixty to seventy cars. They stop first at Wounded Knee where a mass grave of the massacre victims lies. As they reflect on the past, they begin to see a way toward the future. The only way to expose their living conditions and sue once more for their rights is to retake Wounded Knee.

They begin their action on February 27. The first building they occupy is Sacred Hearth Church, beside which is the long trench containing the bodies of the 153 victims of the original massacre. They block the roads and occupy the remaining buildings. They have three demands.

They want:

1. Richard Wilson was removed from office and preferably a return to the traditional way of tribal chiefs,
2. Dismissal of two BIA officials and a Senate investigation of corruption in the BIA, and
3. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee to hold hearings of 371 treaties negotiated between the United States and various indigenous nations, few of which have been honored by the United States.

The U.S. government refuses to negotiate and calls in the FBI with automatic weapons, helicopters, gas grenade launchers, tracer bullets, and armored personnel carriers.

The standoff begins. There are intermittent fire fights. Wounded Knee is difficult to defend militarily because it is in a shallow valley surrounded by hills. The FBI places their guns on the same hills where the old Hotchkiss guns were mounted in 1890.

From all over the country, native peoples respond to the occupation by sending supplies or coming themselves. At one point representatives from sixty-five different tribes are present.

The FBI tries to block all reinforcements and supplies. Hikers go through the back trails in the dead of night to carry in food. The FBI charges those caught with a felony violation punishable up to five years in prison and a ten thousand dollar fine. As the siege heads into its second month, the food supplies run low and it looks as though the occupiers may have to give up.

Then a clandestine airlift drops parachute after parachute of food in a predawn flight.

As the siege goes on, the fire fights increase in duration and intensity. More than ten thousand bullets stream into Wounded Knee from the surrounding hills in just one night of fighting. One of the vigilante goon squads turns off the water supply, leaving the occupiers without sanitation facilities or safe drinking water.

Inside, the occupiers develop a cooperative community. Work is shared. They hold a spiritual gathering, build a sweat lodge, and learn more about their own culture. On March 11 Wounded Knee declares its sovereignty from the United States of America. It is now land controlled by the Independent Oglala Sioux Nation.

A Harris Poll finds that fifty-one percent of the U.S. population supports the Sioux occupation of Wounded Knee. Finally an agreement is reached to allow the AIM leaders to meet at the White House. The meeting never takes place. Once the leaders are out of Wounded Knee, the U.S. government demands that they lay down all of their weapons before there are further

negotiations. Remembering what happened when Big Foot gave up his weapons in 1890, the occupiers refuse.

The occupation lasts for seventy-one days. Two occupiers are dead and fifteen others wounded. In the end a group of Sioux elders, the traditional tribal leadership, negotiates with the U.S. government, demanding and receiving assurances on virtually the same set of demands that the occupiers originally made.

Wounded Knee is no longer just the site of a massacre—it is also the site of a victory. Wounded Knee and AIM become a rallying point for a new spirit of resistance among the native peoples.

~ See Bill Zimmerman, *Airlift to Wounded Knee*

Indigenous Resistance: South

Hispaniola, 1494: First Resistance

It takes only a few months for the Tainos to realize the real intentions of the Spaniards. The Spaniards demand more and more women, some taking as many as five apiece. They keep asking for gold. When the Santa Maria runs aground, they build a fort, La Navidad. Spanish cruelty and terror continue until a local *cacique* named Caonabo can take it no longer. He and his followers kill all the Spaniards and destroy the fort. Continuing to fight, he organizes the first guerrilla war against the invaders.

Other resistance leaders follow him: Guaynabo and Otao in Puerto Rico. Hutuey and Guamax in Cuba. The resistance continues for fifty years even though the Tainos are decimated by disease.

~ See Jose Barreiro, "A Not on Tainos," *View from the Shore*, 7:3, 73, 76

The Invasion of Latin America



After celebrating mass and communion, Francisco Pizarro set off from Panama in 1530 to steal the wealth of the Andes for himself and his king. At the end of 1532 he and his men arrived in the land of the Incan king Atahualpa, whom they lured into a trap. The night before the ambush, the Spaniards spent praying and polishing their swords. The next day they slaughtered thousands of Incans and took Atahualpa prisoner.

Knowing that the Spaniards wanted gold, Atahualpa offered a large room full of gold treasures in return for his release. Pizarro agreed and watched for two months as Incans brought their finest pieces of

artwork as ransom. Pizarro commanded the people to melt down their art into bars.

After receiving reinforcements, Pizarro charged Atahualpa with treason. He was tried, baptized, and strangled. Pizarro and his men moved on to invade Cuzco, the dazzling capital of the empire. Entering the sacred Temple of the Sun in order to sack it, a contemporary observed:

Struggling and fighting among each other, each trying to get his hands on the lion's share, the soldiers in their coats of mail trampled on jewels and images and pounded the gold utensils with hammers to reduce them to a more portable size....They tossed all of the temple's gold into a melting pot to turn it into gold bars: the laminae that covered the walls, the marvelous representations of trees, birds, and other objects in the garden" (Pendle, 44).

The invasion of Chile followed. Diego de Almagro led an expedition in 1535. Finding no great wealth, he returned to Spain, only to be followed by Pedro de Valdivia, who founded the city of Santiago in 1541. Six months later local indigenous natives almost destroyed it.

Before Pizarro died he ordered one of his captains, Francisco de Orellana, to sail down a wide river which they later named the Amazon after the marvelous women they saw there. Orellana sailed two thousand miles to the Atlantic Ocean.

The history of Chile, Peru and Bolivia was shaped by the forced labor of the indigenous population and imported African slaves. Even though in 1528 the king of Spain ordered that the Indians should not be used in forced labor, the Spaniards ignored his edict.

The *encomienda* became a system of rewarding Spaniards for military service. The crown then "commended" the care of groups of the indigenous to that *encomendero* for two or three generations. The encomendero was supposed to provide for their Christianization and care.

In reality, the Spaniards exploited their labor to make quick profits. In 1620 indigenous and *mestizos* laborers living on the haciendas were required to work 160 days a year. The situation didn't change much over time: in 1953, Chilean rural tenants and laborers typically worked well over 200 days including the labor of the whole family.

The quest for indigenous and workers' justice has been a constant throughout Latin America. In Chile, the Araucanians resisted the Spanish invasion longer and more successfully than any other indigenous group. It took over three centuries before they were finally defeated and their lands taken. During the period the region south of the Bio Bio River most of the remained liberated territory.

~ Brian Loverman, *Chile*, and George Pendle, *A History of Latin America*, 44-47.

Caribbean Islands, 1511: Hatuey



Cacique Hatuey sees it is useless to fight directly against the Spaniards with their criminal ways. And so he, like thousands of others who will follow him in the centuries to come, flees into the brambles. He knows if they capture him he will be killed. The Spaniards always kill the leaders because once they are dead, it is easy to subdue the rest. With a small band, Hatuey flees by canoe to Cuba (one reason why he is claimed today as a Cuban national hero).

The Spaniards search for him for days. Every native captured alive they torture for information about Hatuey. No one speaks. Finally after three months they find him.

When they are ready to burn him at the stake, a Franciscan friar urges him to die a Christian and be baptized.

Hatuey asks, *Why should I be like a Christian? They are bad people who only worship to the God of gold.*

The priest responds, *Because those who die Christians go to heaven where they eternally see God and rest.*

Do Christians go to heaven? asks Hatuey.

Certainly.

Then I do not wish to go there. Hatuey says definitly.

The torch touches the wood. He burns alive.

~ Eric Williams, ed., *Documents of West Indian History*, 1:92-93; Also see Eduardo Galeano, *Memories of Fire: Genesis*, 57.

San Dominique, 1519: Enriquillo



Queen Anacaona

It has been sixteen years since they brought Enriquillo, son of beautiful Queen Anacaona, to a convent of the Franciscan monks to be raised. On that day most of his family were massacred by the Spaniards. He is now a young man of nineteen, speaks Spanish well, and is tall and aloof, speaking little and sleeping even less. His royal lineage does not keep him from being enslaved—after all, he’s an “Indian.”

One night, the arrogant man who bought him tries to rape his wife Mencia. Outraged, Enriquillo tries to gain justice for this crime through the courts, but to no avail. Having exhausted all legal means, he leaves for the mountains with his people and several trained and armed slaves.

After fourteen years of resistance, the Spanish Emperor Charles V is humiliated and so anxious to gain peace that he directs the governor to deliver a royal letter to Enriquillo. Enriquillo accepts the terms of peace while maintaining the secrecy of his camp. In his bones he knows the deceit of these Europeans. When the treaty is signed the people rejoice, for they are declared free. Enriquillo dies in 1535, leaving behind the memory of his heroic struggle that will take nearly three centuries to complete.

~ See Jean Fouchard, *The Haitian Maroons*, 304-306

Caribbean, Sixteenth Century: Ciguayo and Tamayo

Inspired by Enriquillo, Ciguayo recruits ten or twelve others and rises in rebellion. They attack the Spaniards on their estates and in the mines. Fear and panic spread. The Spaniards pursue him to a gorge where he is hiding. Later, Spanish priest Bartolome de las Casas writes: *He fought like a mad dog, as if he wore armour from head to toe...a Spaniard passed a lance half through his body and even then he fought like a Hector. Finally, when he was bleeding and losing strength, all the Spaniards rushed up and put an end to him.*

The Spaniards find it easier to kill Indians than to kill the spirit of rebellion. No sooner is Ciguayo dead than Tamayo organizes another band to carry on the rebellion. The Spaniards don’t even

feel safe in their towns now. How is it that four thousand Spaniards are afraid of only two hundred fifty natives? The first priest ordained in the Americas writes: *This can only be attributed to the Divine Judgment, which wished to prove to us three things: first that the Indians did not lack courage...even though they were naked and very peace loving; secondly, that if only they had weapons like ours, and horses and arquebuses, they would not have been exterminated from the face of the earth as we exterminated them; thirdly, that that was an indication of the condemnation of such deeds, and of the punishments we shall suffer in the life to come for the heinous sins committed against God and against our fellow men, if we do not repent in this life.*

~ Quoted in Eric Williams, *Documents of West Indian History*, 1:93-94

The Requerimiento

In the name of the King of Spain I require you to acknowledge the supremacy of the Pope and the Crown over these lands or else we have the right to attack and you will suffer war and enslavement.

~ Pedro Alvarado

The indigenous send back the reply: *"We do not know either of them."*

~ Jonathan Fried, et. Al., eds., *Guatemala in Rebellion*, 9-10

The Amazon, 1542: "Raining Arrows"



Raining Arrows

Francisco Pizarro, not content with the riches of Peru, sends his brother Gonzalo and Francisco de Orellano to look for El Dorado and the Land of Cinnamon. Orellana is a gifted linguist who seems to understand the native tongue. The group encounters a village where members of the tribe are subjects of a group of women who the Spaniards refer to as Amazons. Drifting further down river they are met by fierce resistance by the indigenous wielding bows and arrows. The Spaniards respond with crossbows and arquebuses. Even in the face of superior firepower the natives fight on.

A Dominican friar accompanying the group, Gaspar de Carvajal, writes in his journal:

...It seemed to rain arrows....I want it to be known what the reason was why these Indians defended themselves in this manner. It must be explained that they are subjects of and tributaries to, the Amazons...There came as many as twelve of them, for we ourselves saw these women, who were fighting in front of all the Indian men as women captains...the Indian men did not dare to turn their backs, and anyone who did turn his back [the women] killed with clubs right before us. The women are white and tall, and have hair very long and braided and wound about the head, and they are very robust and go naked, [but] with their privy parts covered, with bows and arrows in their hands, doing as much fighting as ten Indian men.

The women are unmarried and when they desire men, they capture them. If they became pregnant they will either kill the male children or send them to their fathers. The females they solemnly raise and instruct them in the art of war. Their leader is called Cornori and they workshop in elaborate temples lined with the colored feather of parrots and macaws.

The Spaniards, fearless conquerors of the Incan empire and wild jungles, see the women and feel a new excitement...and dread.

~ Abby Wettan Kleinbaum, *The War Against the Amazons*, 119-123

Chile, 1553: Araucanian Victory

It's Christmas Day and Pedro de Valdivia wants presents of concubines and slaves to replace the encomienda Indians decimated by forced labor, mistreatment, and smallpox. Lautaro, chief of the Araucanians, used to be Valdivia's page. While attending to Valdivia's needs, he has also served the needs of his people by learning Spanish military tactics and their weaknesses. Ingeniously, the Araucanians have tipped their lances with Spanish swords; they wear helmets and vests made of sealskin and whalebone. They try to fight in the rain to make it difficult for the Spaniards to light the fuses of their arquebuses.

Lautaro lures Valdivia and his fifty men into a trap. No Spaniard survives. Some say Valdivia died in battle, his severed head on the tip of an Araucanian lance made of metal forged in Seville.

Other say the Araucanians poured molten gold down his throat because that's what he thirsted for so badly. Still others say it was Araucanian soil that filled his stomach until he burst. No matter. Whichever is true, he received in death exactly what he lusted for in life, some say what he deserved.

~ Brian Loveman, *Chile*, 53; Eduardo Galeano, *Memories of Fire: Genesis*, 119-120

Spanish Atrocities

Spanish abuses against the indigenous population became so numerous and ghastly that even the Spanish king became shocked. The priests profited from enforced labor, and the conquistadors killed and maimed far beyond what was needed for military reasons.

Chile and Peru: 1560-1749

Chile, 1560: Why They Rebel, Part I

Hernando de Santillan, advisor to the governor, has tried for three years to prohibit the indigenous people from being used as pack animals. He has failed. Upon leaving Chile he writes about his own countrymen:

[They] killed, maimed and set dogs upon the Indians, cut off feet, hands, noses and teats, stole their lands, raped their women and daughters, chained them up and used them as beasts of burden, burned their houses and settlements and laid waste their fields.

Fray Gil de San Nicolas, in the tradition of Bartolome de las Casas, also writes about the real conditions of the indigenous:

They take the Indian men and women prisoners in chains and use them for "dog bait," watching the dogs tear them apart for sport. They destroy the crops, burn the houses and villages full of Indians, shutting the doorways [of the houses] so none can escape.

~ Brian Loveman, *Chile*, 60

Peru, 1613: Why They Rebel, Part II

Felipe Huaman Poma de Ayala, descendant of an Incan chief, is an artist with a conscience. He sits down to write a letter to King Phillip III telling him of the abuses against his people by the clergy. At this time there is one priest, friar, or nun for every ten Peruvians.

...The various religious orders established in Peru...show an unholy greed for worldly wealth and the sins of the flesh and a good example would be set to everyone if they were punished by the Holy Inquisition.

These priests are irascible and arrogant. They wield considerable power and usually act with great severity towards their parishioners....They readily engage in business, either on their own or other people's account, and employ a great deal of labor without adequate payment.

A favorite source of income for the priesthood consists in organizing the portage of wine, chillies, cocoa, and maize. These wares are carried on the backs of Indians and llamas and in some cases need to be brought down from high altitudes. The descent often results in death for the Indians, who catch a fever when they arrive in a warm climate.

Three years later, Felipe finishes the letter that now includes four hundred line drawings and a catalogue of abuses, atrocities and resistance. It is twelve hundred pages.

~ H. McKennie Goodpasture, ed., *Cross and Sword*, 44

Peru, 1749: Why They Rebel, Part III

Two brothers, Jorge Juan and Antonio de Ulloa, ship captains of the Royal Armada, visit Peru. They too write back to the king:

The tyranny suffered by the Indians stems from the insatiable desire for riches on the part of those who come from Spain to rule over them. The latter have no other means of satisfying this lust than by exploiting the Indians. Using every oppressive measure at their disposal, officials exact more through cruelty than they obtain from their own slaves....

In those kingdoms Indians are veritable slaves....The Indians do not retain even the tiniest part of the sum which their toil, sweat, and hard work have earned....

They use fines or court costs to gain ownership of an Indian's cow, mule or other cattle....These continuous extortions have reduced the Indians to such a miserable state that they cannot even be compared to the poorest, most abject people imaginable....

The repartimiento system, so cruelly wicked that it appears as if it were imposed on the people as a punishment...a more tyrannical abuse could not be imagined...

~ Jorge Juan and Antonio de Ulloa, eds., *Kingdoms of Peru*, 70, 76, 77

The Age of Andean Resistance

In what is now Peru and Bolivia, the years 1742-1783 marked a period of intense and constant rebellion by the indigenous people.

History of Defiance

Well over one hundred times between the years 1720 and 1790 the native Andean people rose up in defiance of colonial authorities. The causes of the rebellion were rooted both in the repressions that the indigenous population had to endure under colonialism and the vision of the return of the great Incan creator. The *Inkarri* myth envisioned the return of an Andean god who would bring in an age of justice. This belief both unified and legitimized the great rebellion of Juan Santos Atahualpa.

Also during this time, resurrection stories circulated telling of the reappearance of the Messiah who would come and recover the Incan greatness. When the invaders decapitated Tupac Amaru I in 1572 the great Incan dynasty came to an end. But they believed that his body had regenerated underground for a possible return.

A New Leader

In 1742 in the Andean jungle, a man calling himself Juan Santos Atahualpa Apo Inca arose as a leader. He was a direct descendant of the Inca king Atahualpa who had been betrayed and strangled by Pizarro. He called upon the indigenous population to join in an insurrection that would bring in a new order by outlawing slavery and expelling the whites.

The colonial authorities, deeply threatened by a possible insurrection, organized military campaigns against Juan Santos in 1742, 1743, 1746, and 1750. Never defeated, Juan Santos controlled the jungle regions, keeping this area from further colonization for over a century.

The Spaniards finally had to rely on a defensive strategy that kept the rebellion from spreading to the sierra.

Frequent Upheavals

From 1751 to 1765, evidence reveals fourteen upheavals against *corregidores* (local governors) and priests. Economic repression was behind most of the revolts of this whole period. The indigenous were under a multiple systems of taxes, forced labor, indebtedness, and payments that left them destitute.

The three main types of economic activity were mines, *brakes* (weaving mills), and haciendas, or plantations. The *Mita* system required the indigenous to work unpaid in mines, *brakes*, or *haciendas* from six to twelve months during the year. This requirement would be repeated every second or third year.

In addition, the *reparto* system forced the indigenous population to purchase European and native goods at inflated prices from the local *corregidor*. They quickly became indebted to the *corregidor* and therefore had to work for him in the mines, *brakes*, or *haciendas*. The *reparto* proved more effective at guaranteeing forced labor than the *mita*.

Added to this burden were local priests who began demanding free personal services from the indigenous while charging for religious services. For example, a high mass with a procession costs twelve pesos. The longer the *reparto* remained in effect, the more pressure it created because the indigenous debt only increased.

Most of the uprisings of this period can be traced to these economic injustices.

~ Steve Stern, ed., *Resistance, Rebellion, and Consciousness in the Andean Peasant World*, and Scarlett O'Phelan Godoy, *Rebellions and Revolts in Eighteenth-Century Peru and Upper Peru*.

Peru, 1742: Juan Santos Atahualpa

Juan Santos is tall, a Jesuit-educated *mestizo* with light skin and short hair worn in the style of the indigenous. He speaks Spanish, Quechua, and Latin. He dresses like those who live in the jungle and around his neck is a crucifix which he always wears.

It is May. The messengers he had sent out days ago are returning to his jungle encampment. The message they carried to the pueblos and colonial missions was that an Incan Lord had appeared, a direct descendant of the murdered Atahualpa. He was sent by God to set the world right and usher in a new order that would free the tribes from oppression and bring in prosperity. The message ends asking for their help to reclaim history.

The messengers return with words from the outlying regions.

The word is Yes.

~ Steve Stern, ed., *Resistance, Rebellion, and Consciousness in the Andean Peasant World*, 43;
Daniel Valcarcel, *Rebeliones Indigenas*, 50-51

Peru, 1746: Guerrilla Victory

General Jose de Llamas exudes arrogance when he walks. The most prestigious officer in Peru, he is fresh from the war with England where he commanded twelve thousand men. Rejecting suggestions to plan carefully, Llamas has nothing but disdain for these jungle “savages” whom he will put down in quick order.

At the beginning of March, he heads into rebel territory with 850 soldiers. The humidity rots their supplies and the mules go lame. The men fall sick and some die. When they reach Mount Salt they are fatigued and demoralized. They were supposed to meet other soldiers under the command of Troncoso. But at that moment Troncoso is being beaten so badly by the indigenous forces of Juan Santos that he has to retreat to avoid annihilation.

With the indigenous is a woman named Dona Ana who was born from the union of an indigenous and a black slave. She commands a company of fifty women.

Neither Llamas nor those who follow him can either find or defeat Juan Santos.

~ Steve Stern, ed., *Resistance, Rebellion, and Consciousness in the Andean Peasant World*, 43, 44; Daniel Valcarcel, *Rebeliones Indigenas*, 61, 62

Peru, 1780: El Grito de Tinta

November 4: Jose Gabriel Condorcanqui is having dinner in the home of his former tutor. The other dinner guest is the local *corregidor* Antonion de Arriaga, an intransigent man who has used his power to cruelly oppress the people. Jose Gabriel excuses himself on the pretext of having an unexpected visitor. With a small band of loyal followers he waits and captures the *corregidor*.

November 10: Jose Gabriel proclaims that he is the legitimate heir of the last Incan ruler Tupac Amaru I. He takes the name of Tupac Amaru II and declares a royal order giving him the power

to seize, try, and punish *corregidores* and their aides. He promises the people that he will abolish the *mita* and the *reparto* and other forms of labor abuses. He calls upon the people to follow him.

He then takes his first act as their new ruler, and the body of Antonio de Arriaga swings from the scaffold, surrounded by indigenous men with muskets, pikes, and slings. The people pledge their lives to him.

November 18: After hearing of Arriaga's execution, Spanish authorities in Cuzco send a force of six hundred soldiers and seven hundred loyal Indians. Tupac Amaru II marches out to meet them at Sangarara where he wins a great victory. The Inca's ranks swell to sixty thousand.

November 26: Tupac Amaru II issues a proclamation of emancipation freeing everyone, including the slaves.

December 6: Micaela Bastidas, the wife of Tupac Amaru, is back at the command pot, governing the country and sending letters to her husband. She is the movement's chief strategist. She understands better than he that their power lies in moving quickly before the Spaniards can call up reinforcements.



Tupac Amaru I Micaela Bastidas

Dear Chepe:

You are causing me grief and sorrow. While you saunter thorough the villages...our soldiers rightly grow tired and are leaving for their homes....I have warned you sufficient times against dallying....I gave you plenty of warnings to march on Cuzco immediately....

Your wife

After I finished this letter, a messenger arrived with the news that the enemy from Paruro are in Archos. I shall march out to meet them though it may cost me my life.

~ June E. Hahner, ed., *Women in Latin American History*, 36-37

Micaela is very beautiful. Her thin neck belies her indomitable spirit. She was the one who had advocated the death of Arriaga. She carried bullets in her mantilla, to shoot him in case he escaped the hanging. While her husband is away she is the government—issuing passports, sending supplies, preventing crime, issuing edicts, appointing officials, and taking charge of prisoners. Generals report to her and priests ask her for assurances and help. She is the chief

propagandist for the cause, recruiting new followers. She even goes out personally on expeditions saying, *I will die where my husband dies.*

~ Lillian Fisher, *The Inca Revolt*

A great many people gathered that day, but nobody uttered a cry or spoke a word...
...Although the weather had been fine and dry, that day dawned overcast, without a sign of the sun, and threatening rain; and at twelve o'clock, when the horses were tugging at the Indian, a strong wind arose, followed by a sudden downpour, so that everybody even the guards, had to run for shelter. As a result of this the Indians are saying that the heavens and the elements were lamenting the death of the Inca whom the cruel impious Spaniards were putting to death so inhumanely.

A contemporary witness

~ In Emir Rodriguez Monegal, ed., *Borzoi Anthology of Latin American Literature*, 1:170

Peru, 1781: Death of the Leaders

May 18: Nine prisoners are led forth, their hands and feet shackled. Seven hang from the gallows. The Inca's son and uncle have no tongues. The executioner takes Micaela up the scaffold, where, in the sight of her husband, her tongue is cut out and a metal collar with screws is tightened around her neck. Her slender neck defies the screws so the executioners tie ropes around her neck, and each pulls in a different direction, and with kicks in the stomach and breast they finally kill her. The general in charge accuses Jose Gabriel of being an accomplice to insurrection and treason. Jose Gabriel looks at the general and says, *There are only two accomplices here, you and I. You in the repression and mistreatment of the people and I in their liberation.*

They bring Jose Gabriel into the middle of the square and the executioner cuts out his tongue. they tie four ropes to his hands and feet and fasten the ropes to the girths of four horses, a sight the city has never seen before. The horses cannot tear him apart, even though they tug at him for a long time so that he springs in the air like a spider. Finally the commander sends words to the executioners to cut off his head, and this is done.

~ Emir Rodriguez Monegal, ed., *Borzoi Anthology of Latin American Literature*, 1:169-170

Peru, 1718: Speaking the Language of the Conquerors



Túpac Amaru II

José Antonio de Areche, representative of the king of Spain, commander of the army and judge of the high court, knows the danger of memory. He decrees: *Indians are forbidden to wear the dress of the gentry, and especially of the nobility, which serves only to remind them of what the ancient Incas wore, bringing back memories that merely cause them to feel more and more hatred for the ruling nation.... They should adopt our Spanish customs and the Castilian [Spanish] language....*

But it didn't work. In Uruguay in the 1960s and 1970s, there arose a group of urban guerrillas struggling to free the country from an oppressive dictatorship. They called themselves the Tupamoros, after Tupac Amaru. Today in Peru, women attempting to work for social justice have formed a reflection and action group called the Micaela Bastidas Committee.

~ Eduardo Galeano, *Memories of Fire: Faces and Masks*, 57, 59

Rebellion and Revolution of Mexico



Jacinto Canek

Mexico Revolts 1700-1910

In Mexico from 1700 to 1900, the rural peoples showed an unparalleled defiance. Historians have recorded around 142 village revolts and rebellions between the years 1700 and 1820. And scarcely a year passed from 1810 to 1920 without some kind of rural uprising. The Mexican countryside had more rebellion during those two centuries than any other part of the hemisphere.

Why did people revolt? Much of the resistance centered on local grievances. Small farmers, sharecroppers, and the indigenous protested unfair taxes and issues surrounding concentration

of ownership of the land in a few hands. Land became the central issue of the Mexican Revolution in 1910 as haciendas kept taking over the land of small farmers and villagers.

Sometimes these local revolts became regional rebellions through the development of alliances with other sectors of the population. There were also caste wars in which the indigenous population fought to expel white authorities. The Yaquis in Sonora and the Maya in the Yucatan were never decisively defeated during the nineteenth century. The indigenous population, nearly wiped out by disease, recovered by the eighteenth century. As their numbers grew, so did their ability to carry out successful resistance campaigns.

The revolt in the Yucatan of the Mayans led by Jacinto Canek was quickly put down but long remembered. The Mayan people have a strong sense of continuity with their past. They pass on their oral history from generation to generation. Their history became alive ninety years later as a new, more successful revolt called the War of the Castes raged for fifty years. Their rallying cry was "Jacinto Canek."

The Yaquis



Lázaro Cardenas

The Yaquis formed the dominate thread of rebellion at times took the form of armed struggle, and at other times was a cultural resistance that found nonviolent ways to defend the culture,

identity and way of life of the people. The Yaquis were able to remain separate while also partially integrating their economy into the larger Mexican society. This feat was central to their lengthy survival.

In 1740, the Yaquis revolted against the paternalism and exploitative labor practices of the Jesuit mission. The Yaquis' grievances were put forward by El Muni, their new leader. In 1736, the priests had El Muni arrested, provoking an outcry and spontaneous demonstration by two thousand Yaquis.

By 1740, many Yaquis were going hungry because the Jesuits had sent out of the territory surplus grains which the Yaquis raided granaries which they thought were theirs anyway. The rebels never killed any priests and generally left the mission property unharmed.

During the nineteenth century, the Yaquis were in almost continual revolt. They opposed white colonization and the dividing of their communal lands into individual plots. They first appealed through legal channels. When that failed, they relied on armed struggle.

By 1873, a new leader, Cajeme, had arisen who emphasized Yaqui self-sufficiency and autonomy and who initiated a cultural awakening through the recreation of traditional festivals and ceremonies, and the reactivation of councils as a democratic form of government. The Yaquis were, at this point, a state within a state, which the Mexican government could not tolerate. A new cycle of attacks against them began.

By the end of the nineteenth century, their resistance took the form of guerrilla bands under their new leader Tetabiate. The Yaquis were more dispersed geographically, but they formed communities in exile that financially supported the guerrilla war.

Mexican president Diaz reacted by deporting Yaquis to distant parts of Mexico. When the revolution of 1910 broke out, the Yaquis joined the revolutionary forces of Pancho Villa and Alvaro Obregon.

In the 1930s the government of Lazaro Cardenas created a *zona indigena* (reserve) which included most of the traditional Yaqui land which they were able to hold in common. New treaties in the 1950s integrated the Yaquis into the large Mexican state through the building of large dams that forced them into export and large-scale agriculture.

Yucatan, 1761: Canek

Legend and history mingle like a braided tapestry. Both could well be true. The revolt lasts a few days; the stories last generations. The stories, the memories, are the fuel that feed the fires of resistance. Two centuries later, one of the spiritual descendants of Canek writes down the stories.

The whites have heaped murder on top of abuse. The indigenous are hungry, miserable. The whites say that there will be no reduction in tribute because the Treasury has great needs. The whites brand indigenous with the same iron that they use for the cattle. Canek breaks the iron. In the church, the offerings from the indigenous go to buy incense and candles. *Why not use some of that money to cure the sick?* Asks Canek as he smashes the statue of San Antonio.

The Indians are in revolt! Yell the whites.

The whites go from house to house seeking the rebels. If they find a machete hanging on the wall, they kill the inhabitants as suspected rebels. If they don't have a machete, they kill them anyway. *They are bound to have a machete someplace,* the Captain explains.

The whites burn the ranch of an indigenous family. *Leave the Indians inside. A burned Indian makes good fertilizer.*

The call to war goes out to the surrounding villages. It is not in writing. The messengers simply dip their hands in the blood of the martyrs assassinated by whites.

Canek calls the people together. Without a word he points to the table filled with bread and weapons. Some take the bread. To those he gives guns and tells them to defend their homes. Some take the weapons. To those he gives bread and tells them to mount the barricades. Others take both guns and bread. Because they are so clever, he makes them the captains.

The white soldiers slaughter the indigenous in the plaza. Row upon row fall. They capture Canek. They tie his hands. *It's useless, Captain, you don't have enough rope to tie the hands of all the people.*

When Canek counts the gallows he is smiling, but the people don't see it because they are looking at the ground. Some say that they saw him, up ahead, on the road to Cisteil. His steps make no noise and the birds do not flee when he passes. His body is clear, like a bright light burning in the sun. He keeps on walking and when he reaches the horizon he begins to ascend.

~ Emilo Abreu Gomez, *Canek: History and Legend of a Maya Hero*, 51-6

The Significance of Cinco de Mayo

The Battle of Puebla

Cinco de Mayo (fifth of May”) is a holiday that commemorates the Mexican army’s unlikely victory over French forces at the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862, under the leadership of General Ignacio Zaragoza Seguín.

The 5th of May is not Mexican Independence Day, but it should be! And Cinco de Mayo is not an American holiday, but it should be. Mexico declared its independence from mother Spain on midnight, the 15th of September, 1810. And it took 11 years before the first Spanish soldiers were told and forced to leave Mexico. Why Cinco de Mayo? And why should Americans savor this day as well? Because 4,000 Mexican soldiers smashed the French and traitor Mexican army of 8,000 at Puebla, Mexico, 100 miles east of Mexico City on the morning of May 5, 1862.



The French had landed in Mexico (along with Spanish and English troops) five months earlier on the pretext of collecting Mexican debts from the newly elected government of democratic President (and Indian) Benito Juarez. The English and Spanish quickly made deals and left. The French, however, had different ideas.

Under Emperor Napoleon III, who detested the United States, the French came to stay. They brought a Hapsburg prince with them to rule the new Mexican empire. His name was Maximilian; his wife, Carolota. Napoleon's French Army had not been defeated in 50 years, and it invaded Mexico with the finest modern equipment and with a newly reconstituted Foreign Legion. The French were not afraid of anyone, especially since the United States was embroiled in its own Civil War.

The French Army left the port of Vera Cruz to attack Mexico City to the west, as the French assumed that the Mexicans would give up should their capital fall to the enemy -- as European countries traditionally did. Under the command of Texas-born General Zaragoza, (and the

cavalry under the command of Colonel Porfirio Diaz, later to be Mexico's president and dictator), the Mexicans awaited. Brightly dressed French Dragoons led the enemy columns. The Mexican Army was less stylish.

General Zaragoza ordered Colonel Diaz to take his cavalry, the best in the world, out to the French flanks. In response, the French did a most stupid thing; they sent their cavalry off to chase Diaz and his men, who proceeded to butcher them. The remaining French infantrymen charged the Mexican defenders through sloppy mud from a thunderstorm and through hundreds of head of stampeding cattle stirred up by Indians armed only with machetes.

When the battle was over, many French were killed or wounded and their cavalry was being chased by Diaz' superb horsemen miles away. The Mexicans had won a great victory that kept Napoleon III from supplying the confederate rebels for another year, allowing the United States to build the greatest army the world had ever seen. This grand army smashed the Confederates at Gettysburg just 14 months after the battle of Puebla, essentially ending the Civil War.

Execution of Maximilian

Union forces were then rushed to the Texas/Mexican border under General Phil Sheridan, who made sure that the Mexicans got all the weapons and ammunition they needed to expel the French. American soldiers were discharged with their uniforms and rifles if they promised to join the Mexican Army to fight the French. The American Legion of Honor marched in the Victory Parade in Mexico, City.



It might be a historical stretch to credit the survival of the United States to those brave 4,000 Mexicans who faced an army twice as large in 1862. But who knows?

In gratitude, thousands of Mexicans crossed the border after Pearl Harbor to join the U.S. Armed Forces. As recently as the Persian Gulf War, Mexicans flooded American consulates with phone calls, trying to join up and fight another war for America.

Mexico City, 1909: The Eve of Revolution

Porfirio Diaz, a strongman of the Americas, rules Mexico like an aristocrat. In dress uniform covered with medallions, he looks like a Prussian Kaiser. Near him is the archbishop, baptizer of

the aristocracy, presiding over a very wealthy church that has accumulated centuries of profits from the backs of the indigenous and *campesinos*.

While peasants cultivate the huge haciendas with oxen and wooden plows, the wealthy attend the Italian marble opera house with its fabulous glass curtain made by Tiffany. The mines are owned by a few capitalists, one of them a citizen of the United States, Meyer Guggenheim, William Randolph Hearst, the San Francisco newspaper tycoon, owns thousands of acres of Mexican land. Some haciendas, like the one owned by the Terrazas family, extend for one million acres. And the haciendas are grabbing more and more land, taking the *ejidos* (traditional communal lands) of the villages. Ninety percent of the population is living in poverty, ten percent in splendor.

The sugar plantations that have dominated the land in the South since the sixteenth century are expanding. Well-paid lawyers use tricks to grab land and water from their rightful but weaker users. Where the refinement of law fails, plantation foremen beat and cheat field hands.

Racism undergirds the theft: *The Indian...has many defects as a laborer, being as he is, lazy, sottish and thieving*. Villages begin to disappear. One plantation owner uses his irrigation system to flood a whole village. The plantation owners meet resistance with brutality.



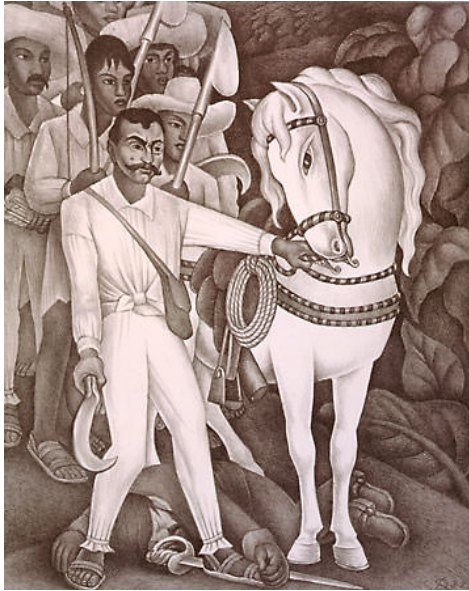
~ Anita Brenner and George Leighton, *The Wind that Swept Mexico*

Tlaltizapan, 1911: Zapata and the Liberating Army of the South

His men follow him out of *cariño*. They admire and respect him, feel tender toward him because he trusts them and does not seek power or glory for himself. He is so loyal to his own troops that his enemies defect to join him. The people of the South believe he is the champion who will right all wrongs. To some he is a father, to others a son or brother, to still other—a *savior*.

He is obsessed with staying true to the people. Never able to betray a promise, he detests the politicians in Mexico City and continually refuses to go there for talks.

His headquarters are out in the countryside he loves so dearly. He says, *The land free, the land free for all without overseers and without masters, is the war-cry of the revolution.*



Zapata by Diego Rivera

The liberating army of the South is a people's army. The men and women are primarily villagers and secondarily soldiers. Zapata insists on the primacy of village democracy and control. The national duty is to uphold the dignity of village life.

He sets up his headquarters in Tlaltizapan; his offices are in an old rice mill on the edge of town. It is a little town with a shady square where people relax in the evening with a beer and talk of the weather and prices. Zapata joins them when he can, savoring a good cigar and savoring his people.

~ John Womack, Jr., *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution*, 241-243

Importance of Rural Revolts

Rural revolts played a central role in the significant changes in Mexican society during the two centuries. Mexico is the only country in the Western Hemisphere where every major social change has been linked to rural revolts. Rural unrest against the Aztecs aided the Spanish invasion. Likewise, rural unrest was the force behind the Mexican independence movement. And finally, in 1910, rural villages, particularly in the South, behind the leadership of Emiliano Zapata, fueled the revolution.

~ Evelyn Hu-Dehart, "Peasant Rebellion in the Northwest: The Yaqui Indians of Sonora, 1740-1976," *Riot, Rebellion and Revolution*, 141-175

Anenecuilco, 1909: Emiliano Zapata



Emiliano Zapata

He just turned thirty. Over the last three years he has been active in village defense, signing protests and generally keeping up village morale.

He is elected president of the village council. He is not a poor man, for his family owns livestock, but he is one of the people. Short in stature and weighing only 130 pounds, he usually wears an oversize sombrero that hides his dark intense eyes.

~ John Womack, Jr., *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution*, 5, 6

Mexico City, 1911-1913: Zapata meets Madero



Madero with Rebel Leaders

The two revolutionary leaders meet in Mexico City conferring on the future of the revolution. Zapata is clear: *What interest us is that, right away, lands be returned to the pueblos, and the promises which the revolution made be carried out.*

Madero says that the land issue is complicated. The most important thing is for Zapata to disband his troops. *I'll disband my boys as soon as the land is divided.*

Zapata, his rural and indigenous roots out of place in this ornate city room, rises, walks to Madero and points his rifle at Madero's gold watch.

Look, Senor Madero, if I take advantage of the fact that I am armed and take away your watch, and after a while we meet, both of us armed the same, would you have a right to demand that I give it back? Madero says that he would have that right and he would ask for interest as well. Well, that's exactly what has happened to us in Morelos, where a few planters have taken over by force the villagers' lands. My soldiers—the armed farmers and all the people in the villages—demand that I tell you, with full respect, that they want the restitution of their lands...right now.

~ John Womack, Jr., *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution*, 96

Mexico City, 1913: Defense of the Revolution

Madero has trusted the military and the *hacendados* and has distrusted Zapata and the men of the South. Those, he realizes as he sits waiting for execution, are his two crucial mistakes. In a few days he will be dead. The man who rose up against him in a military coup was Victoriano Herta. And, ironically, it is Zapata who tried to save him.

Herta needs Zapata so he tries to negotiate with him. When that fails he tries to buy him off. Not today or ever will Emiliano Zapata betray the cause of his people. He tells Huerta:

We do not want the peace of slaves, nor the peace of the grave...We want peace based on liberty, on the political and agrarian reform promised by our political creed; we are incapable of trafficking with the blood of our brothers and we do not want the bones of our victims to serve as a staircase to public offices....

~ Robert P. Millon, *Zapatas: The Ideology of a Peasant Revolutionary*, 19-20

The Mexican Revolution

In the late nineteenth century haciendas extended their power by using new technology, irrigation systems, and foreign capital to produce cash crops for export. These crops included cotton, sugar cane, tobacco, cacao, and vanilla. These practices drove the peasant off the land.



Francisco Madero

In 1910, Mexico was a nation dominated by haciendas, large plantations worked by peasants and sharecroppers. These laborers were usually in debt to the hacienda owner who lived a comfortable life from the profits produced by cheap labor. In Morelos, for example, the ownership of the land was so concentrated in the hands of a few people that thirty haciendas controlled almost all of the cultivated land there.

Sugar production was strong, based on export and maximizing profits. The sugar plantations and other haciendas were hungry for more land and so ate up the small plots worked by peasant farmers. The political life of the nation was controlled by the elite sectors of the military, wealthy merchants, and the hacienda owners.

Porfirio Diaz, aligned with these wealthy elites, had been president of Mexico since 1884. In 1910, Francisco Madero, son of a wealthy *hacendado*, began the revolution that in a few months toppled Diaz from power. Joining Madero were Pancho Villa and Pascual Orozco in the North and Emiliano Zapata in the South.

The *Zapatistas*, as the people who followed Zapata were called, at first were called, at first were very sympathetic to Madero because he talked of a land reform plan that would return some land to the peasants. Even though Zapata won a crucial victory in the South, once Madero came to power in 1911 he wanted Zapata to disband his troops. Madero also refused to implement any of the land reform that he had promised. The agrarian reform was such a central part of the *Zapatistas'* struggle that they broke with Madero and fought against him in the name of the true revolution.

The Plan of Ayala

Depiction of the *Zapatistas* by Diego Rivera

That same year, the *Zapatistas* drew up their own land reform proposal called the Plan of Ayala. The plan called for the restoration of land taken from the peasant; one-third of the lands of the haciendas would



become ejidos, the traditional communal lands of the indigenous; and all those owners and politicians who opposed this redistribution would have their land taken without compensation. The plan also authorized the people to take the land immediately when possible. That plan would be their banner for the remainder of the revolution.

Centennial Commemoration of The Mexican Revolution



From the Dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz to the Revolution—The Revolutionaries by David Alafaro Siqueiros

On November 20, 2010 Mexico celebrated the Centennial Anniversary of its Revolution. On this date, in the year 1910 the revolutionary war to overthrow the dictator Porfirio Díaz, began. General Porfirio Díaz had been an important military figure during the wars against the foreign invaders, and had tried to overthrow President Benito Juárez in 1872. Then again, he rebelled against President Lerdo de Tejada in 1876 and won.

Don Porfirio, as he was called, had been in power for more than 30 years (1876-1911). Under his rule, Mexico had political stability and grew in many areas, creating new industries, railroads, kilometers of railroad tracks as well as the increase of foreign capital. Non-the less, this progress was not translated into the peoples' well being.

Soon there was political unrest. The unhappiest sectors of the Mexican society were the peasants and labor workers. To defend these two popular sectors, Ricardo Flores Magón founded the Mexican Liberal Party. Flores Magón was obviously persecuted by the Porfirist regime, and died in an American prison. In 1906 the army brutally repressed a strike of miners in the Cananea mine in Sonora. As you can see, Díaz did every thing in his power to

crush any uprisings. The Cananea massacre is historically considered the spark that finally ignited Mexico's Revolution.

Don Portfirio by David Alafaro Siqueiros
Porfirio Díaz wasn't oblivious to all this pressure, so in 1908 in an interview given to an American journalist, James Creelman, he stated:

I have waited patiently for the day when the people of the Mexican Republic would be prepared to choose and change their Government at every election without danger of armed revolutions and without injury to the national credit or interference with national progress.



I believe that day has come. ...

I welcome an opposition party in the Mexican Republic," he said. "If it appears, I will regard it as a blessing, not as an evil."

In early 1909 Francisco I. Madero founded the Anti Reelectionist Party.

Madero came from a wealthy family from Coahuila. He had studied business in France as well as in the U.S. He vigorously fought against reelection and for democracy and liberty in Mexico through his political newspaper articles.

The Anti Reelectionist party designated him to run for President in the elections of 1910. Díaz was now under constant pressure, and on June 6th he ordered the imprisonment of Madero, augmenting that he was "inciting rebellion and offending the authorities".

Francisco I. Madero was taken to a prison in San Luis Potosí, where he awaited the results of the elections. There he learned that through an electoral fraud Díaz declared himself President of Mexico one more time!

Then and there Madero, who had always been a pacifist, decided to flee from prison and call for a National Insurrection on November 20 1910. He declared the electoral process invalid and appointed provisional Governors. Immediately, uprising broke out in several Mexican states. The first were Puebla, Coahuila, Chihuahua and Sonora.

Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, was taken by the insurrectors: Pascual Orozco and Francisco "Pancho" Villa. When the city surrendered Madero set up his provisional government there. Díaz was then forced to resign and had to abandon the country.



Zapata by Greek artist, Giannis "Gigas" Thomas

Some of the most important Revolutionaries were: Pascual Orozco, Francisco Villa in the northern states, and Emiliano Zapata in the south.

New elections took place in 1911, and Madero was elected President of Mexico. Unfortunately, peace was not to come to this country for a while. Several Revolutionary leaders couldn't settle their differences. Madero wanted to work steadily and patiently towards bettering the economic and social situation. But many revolutionary commanders wanted immediate change, which was impossible to accomplish. Pascual Orozco, for example, led and lost a revolt

against Madero.

Three Porfirist generals also attacked President Madero, who in turn, appointed Victoriano Huerta to repress the offensive. A fatal decision.... In time history would prove that Victoriano Huerta was the utmost traitor of the Revolution. Francisco I. Madero was captured and assassinated by Huerta's accomplices. The vice-president and a brother of Madero were also killed.

Huerta's victory would be short-lived. A new Revolutionary movement emerged with unprecedented force; it was called the Constitutionalist Movement. Huerta had to flee the country in 1914. In 1917 the Constitution was reformed. Fighting among revolutionary groups did not end until 1920.

As the first decade of the 20th Century progressed, discontent with the government of Porfirio Díaz began to spread throughout the country. During his time in office, key principles such as social justice and the exercise of democracy had been ignored.

In 1908, Porfirio Díaz announced that he would retire from power at the end of his term because he believed that Mexico was ready for democracy. This statement unleashed a political fervor throughout the country.

In his book «The Presidential Succession in 1910», Francisco I Madero set forth the need for a peaceful and democratic change.

In 1909, he began to travel around the country, spreading a message that took root in the civic consciousness of the Mexican people.

Mexican Countryside, 1917: Women in the Revolution, Adelitas

*Popular among the troops was Adelita
The woman that the sergeant idolized
More than courageous she was beautiful
And even the colonel respected her.*

~ Popular Mexican folk song

The women who fought in the revolution were called Adelitas. The feminine presence in the revolution was widespread. This image of the woman soldier has formed part of the legends of the revolution.

They do everything. They cook and they command troops. They accompany their husbands and they lead them. Some disguise themselves as men, others enter the army as wives and mothers, taking care of their families under hazardous and difficult conditions. They ride the tops of trains heading into battle. Some come because their husbands make them; others come dragging their husbands, Margarita Neri and Carmen Alanis command troops, while Juana Belen and Dolores Jimenez de Muro rise to the rank of colonel.

They would call us Adelitas because we were revolutionaries. But the real Adelita was from Ciudad Juarez. This Adelita would say, "Let's go. The one who is afraid stays to cook beans!" And amid gunshots and gunshots, the one who disobeyed—she herself would kill them. She was very brave.

Like women always, they do what is necessary. When commanders need secret information, they are spies and couriers. When the battle is fierce, they carry and shoot carbines and pistols. When uniforms need mending, they are seamstresses. When the outside world needs information, they are journalists and propagandists and secretaries. When the injured come back from the battle, they are nurses and doctors. They formulate plans, write declarations, make tortillas and love.

~ Julia Tuñon Pablos. *Mujeres en Mexico: Una Historia Olvidada*, 133-140

Government Atrocities

General Victoriano Huerta carried out a military coup against Madero and had him assassinated. Huerta and his men, under the direction of Juvencio Robles, wrought horrible destruction to the South. The government armies tortured, mutilated, and killed unarmed

villagers and raped the women. They burned whole villages and used the tactic of creating concentration camps where they took the villagers.

The *Zapatistas* in the South and Villa and Venustiano Carranza in the North kept up the revolutionary struggle. In 1914, they defeated Huerta. Carranza and his wing of the revolution, called the Constitutionalists, came to power. Carranza refused to implement the kind of sweeping land reform that Zapata wanted. After a short peace, Zapata and Villa once again began fighting for what they believed was the real revolution. Carranza became more conservative, siding with the politicians in Mexico City and losing sight of the *campesinos* in the countryside. His troops carried out some of the same atrocities as Huerta, and in 1919 Carranza had one of his men betray and assassinate Emiliano Zapata. The *Zapatistas* continued fighting under the leadership of Gildardo Magaña.

Morelos, 1919: Betrayal, Death and Resurrection



Colonel Jesus Guajardo

Zapata returns to Morelos with new energy for the struggle. He is negotiating with Colonel Jesus Guajardo to defect to the rebels. If that happens there will be the troops and the army to retake all of Morelos for the true revolution. His spies pick up rumors of a trick, but Zapata restrains his suspicions. Zapata meets Guajardo in his home territory, thirty-five miles from the village of Ayala, the town whose name bears the plan at the heart of the revolution.

At 2:10 p.m. on April 10, Guajardo orders a bugle honor call for Zapata. As the last note dies away, Zapata reaches the doorway where the soldiers presenting arms shoot him at point blank range. Emiliano Zapata, the “Savior,” is dead, killed by the orders of a Jesus who gets a fifty thousand peso reward. Many months before, Emiliano Zapata had said, *I want to die a slave to principles, not men.* He does.

The government sends the corpse back to the people of Morelos, so that they will verify his death. The government believes that killing Zapata will kill the revolution. Los *humildes*, the humble common people, file past the body and tremble from head to toe. *It hurt me as much as if my own father had died.* Some say it is not Zapata because the face is missing a mole or the hand is not missing a finger. Some say they saw him riding in the hills. But there is no such resurrection.

The resurrection of Emiliano Zapata comes in the people he loved. The resistance continues with Gilgardo Magana as Zapata's successor. A message circulates: *Rebels of the South, it is better to die on your feet than to live on your knees.*

~ John Womack, Jr., *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution*, 326-330

A Triumph

Álvaro Obregon, a radical Constitutionalist, came out of retirement because of Carranza's move to the right, and overthrew him in 1920. With Obregon in power, much of what the *Zapatistas* had fought for became part of the revolutionary government. Zapata's desire to promote popular education resulted in the building of thousands of schools in the countryside.

The villagers of Morelos held onto their lands and the new government of 1920 instituted guarantees to them that they could keep it. Twice during the Mexican Revolution the U.S. government directly intervened with troops—once at Vera Cruz in 1914 and again in the North in 1916-1917. These and other U.S. interferences kept the revolution from achieving all that it had hoped for. Some of the best achievements had to wait for the regime of Lazaro Cardenas (1934-1940).

~ John Womack, Jr., *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution*, and Robert P. Millon, *Zapata: Ideology of a Peasant Revolutionary*

Morelos, 1920: Triumph

The year ends with agrarian reform as a national policy. The *Zapatistas* are integrated into the national army. The area of Morelos, on whose behalf Zapata had taken up the revolution, has survived systematic arson, concentration camps, and mass executions. The people of Anenecuilco, hometown of Zapata, filter back and gain plantation lands as their own under the new law. Most large sugar plantations are gone. *What was called prosperity for the state was misery for us. We are [now] growing what we want to grow and for our own use.*

~ John Womack, Jr., *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution*, 369-374



William Walker

Central American Resistance: Nicaragua

Nicaragua: Early Resistance

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Subtiava tribe fought the Spaniards. In 1811-1812 indigenous insurrections arose in Leon, Masaya, Granada, and Rivas, the people armed with only sticks and machetes. The 1820s and 1840s were periods of renewed rebellion.

In 1856 a U.S. citizen named William Walker came to Nicaragua, proclaimed himself president, made English the official language, and reinstated slavery. He confiscated Nicaraguans' land to give to U.S. citizens and received backing from the slave states and immediate diplomatic recognition by the U.S. government. Uprisings ousted Walker and chased him from Nicaragua.



Jose Santos Zelaya

Zelaya

When the Panama Canal was built in 1903, Nicaraguan president Jose Santos Zelaya investigated the possibility of a second canal through Nicaragua. That suggestion, along with his willingness to trade with Britain and Japan, infuriated the United States, whose government believed it should have sole control over Central America.

In 1908 Zelaya contracted for a loan from a British firm to build a railway in Nicaragua. The United States accused him of breaking the Monroe Doctrine by having such close relations with outside countries. When two U.S. citizens were caught sabotaging Nicaraguan ships and were tried and executed, the U.S. government had the pretext it needed to intervene. Four hundred Marines arrived to "protect U.S. lives and property." The assault was financed by a contribution of one million dollars by U.S. businessmen. After the overthrow of Zelaya's presidency, the United States finally installed its man, Adolfo Diaz, as president. Diaz eventually modified the Nicaraguan constitution to allow for U.S. intervention and U.S. bankers rapidly assumed control of the country's finances.



More Resistance

In 1912, in response to the rise to power of the U.S.-backed Conservative Party, General Benjamin “El Indio” Zeledon began a popularly based resistance movement. After the rebels won several important victories, the U.S. troops were called in. They stormed Zeledon’s position, killing him and more than six hundred of his followers.

The twenty-seven hundred U.S. Marines, their job finished, left, but very soon they were called in again. In 1927 the United States feared intervention from Mexico. Asserting that only the

United States could intervene in other countries, the government sent four thousand Marines and soldiers to Nicaragua.

At the time two Nicaraguan factions were fighting each other. The United States imposed a ceasefire and required all arms to be handed over to the Marines. Jose Maria Moncada, leader of one of the factions, surrounded. In his army was a man named Augusto Cesar Sandino.

Sandino, with only a few men at first, refused to surrender. He said that the real problem in Nicaragua was U.S. intervention and called for a Nicaragua free from outside domination. His fight against U.S. imperialism inspired a new wave of Nicaraguan insurrection that would last decades.

~ George Black, *Triumph of the People*

Beginnings of Revolution

San Albino Mines, 1926

Augusto Caesar Sandino has just returned from Mexico where he worked at the Huasteca Petroleum Company. He brings his life savings of five thousand dollars, which he is ready to give over to the revolutionary struggle that is in its beginning stages.

Meeting with miners from San Albino, he hears and sees the wretchedness of their lives. The United States owns the mines. The workers tell him how they are barely paid in coupons, which are of no value except at the company store. They work fifteen hours a day and then return to

their huts where they have to sleep on the floor because they have no beds. The mines are under constant guard so there cannot be resistance.

These miners will become the first soldiers in Sandino's struggle for liberation.

~ Gregorio Selser, *Sandino*

Moncada's Camp, 1927: First Manifesto

Moncada has made his deals with the U.S. government and is ready to surrender. He calls his generals together to tell them how to give up their arms. Everybody is there—except Sandino. Moncada rushed the meeting so that when Sandino arrived he'd be too late.

Moncada: *As my subordinate, you must accept the decision to disarm.*

Sandino: *I protest that this meeting was called so that I could not be present.*

Moncada: *And who made you a general?*

Sandino: *My comrades in arms, señor. I owe my rank neither to traitors nor invaders.*

Sandino consults his troops. Twenty-seven refuse to surrender. Sandino issues a manifesto: *Seeing that the United States of North America, lacking any right except that with which brute force endows it, would deprive us of our country and our liberty, I have accepted its unjust challenge, leaving to History the responsibility for my actions. To remain inactive or indifferent, like most of my fellow citizens, would be to subject myself to this vulgar multitude of parricide merchants.*

~ Gregorio Selser, *Sandino*, 76-77

Nicaragua, 1927

Yali, 1927: Father and Son

Don Gregorio, Sandino's father and a friend of Moncada, comes to persuade his son to surrender. They move out to a little open area, but still in earshot of Sandino's small band of followers. Don Gregorio tells him that in this world saviors end up on the cross and the people are not grateful and forget. Sandino remains adamant that this is the proper course. His

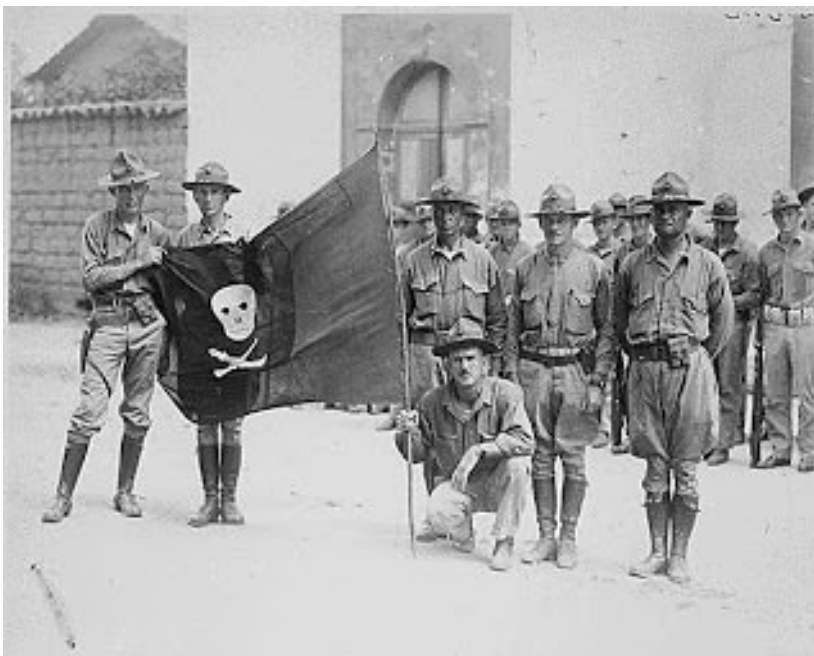


gestures and his words tell his men that he will not turn back or surrender. Viva Sandino, they shout.

Don Gregorio leaves. He writes a letter to his other son Socrates saying, Come, join your brother's cause.

~ Gregorio Selser, *Sandino*, 78

Ocotal, 1927: Ultimatum



U.S. Marines in Nicaragua
G.D. Hatfield, commanding officer of the U.S. Marines in Nicaragua, is growing impatient. He writes a final letter to Sandino:

It does not seem possible that you remain deaf to reasonable proposals, and despite your insolvent replies to my suggestions in the past, I hereby offer you one more opportunity to surrender with honor... Otherwise you will be proscribed and placed outside the law, hunted wherever you

go and repudiated everywhere, awaiting an infamous death: not that of the soldier who falls in battle but that of a criminal who deserves to be shot in the back by his own followers...

In conclusion, I wish to inform you that Nicaragua has had its last revolution...

~ Gregorio Selser, *Sandino*, 79

Camp El Chipote, 1927: The Ant Confronts the Elephant

Sandino responds:

Captain G.D. Hatfield, Ocotal

I received your communications yesterday and fully understand it. I will not surrender and await you here. I want a free country or death.

I am not afraid of you; I rely on the patriotic ardor of those who accompany me.

A.C. Sandino

~ Gregorio Selser, *Sandino*, 79-80

Ocotal, 1927: Massacre

President Coolidge calls it *an heroic action*. Diaz, the U.S.-picked man in Nicaragua, calls for medals for the airmen. The Marines call in air support in Ocotal, planes that rain bombs down upon the town. Following orders to gun the bandits down mercilessly where they are encountered, they empty their bomb racks and then swoop low and empty their machine guns on the fleeing people. One U.S. soldier is killed. Three hundred Nicaraguans—men, women, and children—are killed and one hundred are wounded.



Edward Dunne

Illinois Governor Edward Dunne writes:

In all of U.S. history there has been no action of such indecency as we now see in Nicaragua...

The slaughter of 300 Nicaraguans by the Americans is a blot on the United States...

H.H. Knowles, former minister of Nicaragua, says in a speech:

I know of no inhuman actions and crimes greater than those committed by the United States against the defenseless peoples of Latin America through its legally authorized agents and representatives...

We have imposed our force upon weak, defenseless, and completely powerless countries, murdering thousands of their subjects, and we have attached them when they expected us to defend them. We have used the Monroe Doctrine to prevent European countries sympathetic to

those republics from coming to their aid. Instead of sending them teachers, instructors, and elements of civilization, we send them hunters of usurious banking concessions, avaricious capitalists, corrupters, soldiers to shoot them down, and degenerates to infest them with every disease.

~ Gregorio Selser, *Sandino*, 80-81

The First Sandinistas



Augusto Caesar Sandino

Augusto Caesar Sandino and the twenty-nine men who refused to surrender took to the hills of Segovia, mountainous jungle, perfect for guerilla warfare. Sandino's army grew, as did the popularity of his cause. Under the slogan "Free Country or Death," his main goals became driving the "gringos" from Nicaraguan soil.

At first the untrained and ill-equipped army suffered defeats. Then they began to change their tactics and develop real guerrilla war maneuvers. The local population acted as spies and assisted with developing a communications network, allowing Sandino to learn quickly about U.S. troop movements. As Sandino's forces began scoring victories over the "Yanqui invaders," the United States turned to using air power against Sandino. However, even with their vastly superior air power, the United States could not defeat the Sandinistas.

Sandino became a folk hero throughout most of Central and Latin America, but in the U.S. press he was portrayed as a "bandit." Cecil B. De Mille wanted to a movie about him but the State Department did not allow it.

By 1930, the United States planned to leave Nicaragua, but not before training and equipping a Nicaraguan National Guard which would act as an agent of U.S. interests. The clear advantage of this arrangement was protecting U.S. interests without risking the lives of U.S. citizens.

In 1932, U.S. troops left Nicaragua, leaving Anastasio Somoza as head of the National Guard. Somoza would soon become dictator, and his family ruled Nicaragua until 1979, the longest dictatorship in Central America. In 1933, Somoza lured Sandino to Managua under the pretext of signing a peace agreement. With approval and direction from the United States, Somoza arranged the assassination of the great leader and folk hero.

~ See Gregorio Selser, *Sandino and George Black, Triumph of the People*

Nicaragua 1927-1935

Nicaragua, 1929: The People

While Sandino's guerrilla band is fighting in the mountains, the people are waging their own struggle in the cities. Children are refusing to learn English in the schools. The United States forces them to attend a U.S. military parade. The people refuse to sing the national anthem and instead shout out Sandino's war cry, *Death to the traitors!* The elderly refuse gifts made in the United States.

A reporter writes, *Sandino has the whole continent behind him.*

~ Gregorio Selser, *Sandino*, 228

Managua, February 21, 1933: Betrayal

President Sacasa

5 p.m.: Sandino arrives at President Sacasa's home.

Early evening: The National Guard holds a Council of War. At dusk Somoza arrives. *I come from the American Embassy, where I have been conferring with Ambassador Arthur Bliss Lane.*

He has assured me that the Washington government supports and recommends the elimination of Augusto Caesar Sandino, considering him as it does a disturber of the country's peace. They draw up a document implicating all of them in the assassination plot—an insurance policy against anyone betraying the others.



At the same time Sandino is having supper in the home of President Sacasa, who himself will be overthrown by Somoza in 1936. They talk of peace and gold mining and Nicaragua's future.

10 p.m.: Sacasa accompanies Sandino; Gregorio, Sandino's father; and Sandino's generals, Umanzor and Estrada to the door. The guests get into the car and head toward the National Guard's Campo de Marte where they encounter a stalled vehicle. Generals Estrada and Umanzor, sensing an ambush, pull out their revolvers. Sandino urges them not to shoot, since Salvatierra and his father are not fighting men. Major Delgadillo, disguised as a Guard corporal, approaches the car and tells them to drop their pistols because they are under arrest. Sandino, Estrada, and Umanzor are ordered into a truck marked GN No. 1 (*Guardia Nacional*) while Salvatierra and Gregorio stay behind. The National Guard takes them to a place called La Calavera (The Skull). Sandino is calm. He asks for a drink of water. The request is denied. Estrada says, *Don't ask these fellows for anything, general, let them kill us.* Standing with his hands in his pockets, Sandino refuses to allow them to search him. His last words: *My political leaders have played jokes with me.*

11 p.m.: Sandino sits on a rock on the right, Umanzor in the middle and Estrada to the left. A shot crackles in the air, the signal to begin. The machine guns open fire. A bullet enters Sandino's brain and chest. Umanzor dies with five in the head, Estrada two in the chest. From the distance, Gregorio hears the shots and says, *Now they're killing them. It always happens; try to be a redeemer, and you get crucified.*

Somoza, knowing the danger of memory, erases the struggle of Sandino's forces from Nicaraguan history books and makes it a crime to speak the name of Sandino.

~ Gregorio Selser, *Sandino*, 174-177

United States, 1935: A Henchman Speaks the Truth



Major General Smedley Butler

Moments occur when the powerful, or those who serve them, speak the truth about what they have done. In his memoirs, Major General Smedley Butler, a Marine who led many invasions into Central America sets the record straight.

I spent 33 years and four months in active service as a member of the ... Marine Corps... and during that period I spent most of my time being a high-class muscle man for Big Business... Thus I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank to collect revenues in... I helped purify

Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1909 and 1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras "right" for American fruit companies in 1903.

~ Joyce Hollyday, ed., *Crucible of Hope*, 10

The Second Sandinistas

For forty years the Somoza family ruled as a dictatorship becoming the nation's largest landholders. The U.S. government calculated their worth at close to a billion dollars by the 1970s. That wealth was in stark contrast to the poverty suffered by the majority of Nicaraguans.

Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional (FSLN)

In 1961 the Sandinista Front was born, taking its name and aspirations from Sandino. By 1963, sixty combatants grouped in Honduras, among them Santos Lopez, a soldier who fought with Sandino. The early years brought deprivation, sacrifice, and only a few victories. The guerrilla force established itself on the Rio Coco on the Honduran/Nicaraguan border.

As one combatant related: "There was nothing to eat, not even animals. There was no salt. It wasn't just hunger that was terrible, but constant cold twenty-four hours a day, because we spent all our time in the river. We were always wet through with the clinging rain of that part of the country, the cold a kind of unrelieved torture, mosquitoes, wild jungle animals, and insects. No shelter, no change of clothes, no food." (Black, 78)



All recruits to the guerrilla force had to commit themselves to live as campesinos. In the late 1960s the guerrilla force remained on the move and hidden while at the same time building the credibility of the movement in the cities and rural areas. In 1974 the Sandinistas boldly broke their silence by kidnapping wealthy landowners and government officials close to Somoza. The raid harmed no one; in exchange for release of the hostages, the Sandinistas received from

Somoza two million dollars, release of Sandinista prisoners of war, and access to the press to proclaim their political program. The daring action gave new visibility to the FSLN among the people.

Tegucigalpa, Honduras, 1961: Resurrection

Three former university students, Tomas Borge, Carlos Fonseca Amador and Silvio Mayorga meet in the Honduran capital to discuss creating a national liberation front in Nicaragua. They have devoured the writings and autobiography of Augusto Caesar Sandino and see that many of Sandino's goals are the same for them: stopping U.S. intervention, creating real independence, and forming a guerilla army in the mountains that will build local support among the campesinos.

They emerge from the meeting committed to national liberation. Their name: *Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional* (FSLN), the Sandinista National Liberation Front.

In Nicaragua some now dare to speak the name of Sandino.

~ George Black, *Triumph of the People*, 75-76

Somoza's Reign of Terror



U.S. Soldiers and Nicaraguan National Guard Members

In 1967 Somoza ordered the killing of six hundred people at a demonstration.

Throughout the late 1960s and 1970s the United States trained the Nicaraguan National Guard and sent arms. When Nicaragua suffered an earthquake in 1972, Somoza stole most of the money sent by international aid organizations and governments to repair the damage and help the people. Somoza's power rested on the ruthlessness of the National Guard and the support of the United States, who

considered him a trusted friend because he always voted with the United States at the United

Nations. When the Central Intelligence Agency invaded Guatemala in 1954, they used Nicaragua as a base of operation.

In the late 1970s even the middle class became disgusted with Somoza and worked for his removal. Somoza's assassination of popular newspaper editor Pedro Chamorro, galvanized the whole nation for the battle to oust the dictator.

In 1878 the Sandinistas took the lead as the people looked to them for direction. A number of popular insurrections spread throughout Nicaragua in 1977 and 1978. Somoza sent in the National Guard to brutally suppress the revolts. They killed thousands of people, including children playing in the streets, but they realized that even with their superior weaponry they were no match for the poorly armed people. The people refused to give up even in the face of massive losses.

Insurrection followed insurrection. The Sandinistas made another daring raid, this time on the National Palace, and held hostage many of Somoza's family and close associates. Again Somoza was forced to give in to their demands. This action prepared the way for the final insurrections and battles leading to the triumph of the revolution on July 19, 1979.

~ George Black, Triumph of the People

Forward we march, compañeros, we advance toward the revolution. Our people are the owners of their history, architects of their liberation.

Combatants of the Sandinista Front, forward, the future is ours, red and black flags cover us, free country, to win or to die.

The children of Sandino do not sell out or surrender, never! We struggle against the Yankee, the enemy of humanity.

Today the dawn is no longer a temptation, tomorrow, someday, will rise a new sun that will illuminate all the land that the heroes and martyrs bequeathed us, in abundant rivers of milk and honey.

Forward, we march...

~ Hymn on the Sandinistas

El Naranjo, 1974: Fire from the Mountain



Omar Cabezas

It was only a few years ago that he was a university student and organizer for the FSLN. In 1970, he had made the momentous decision to leave the city and join the guerrillas in the mountains. Omar Cabezas will some day be a Sandinista leader. Now he is still battling the mud and exhaustion of the mountains. He and his *companeros* are always wet. Some days they only eat three spoonfuls of corn meal while marching up and down the mountains. They contract a skin disease called mountain leprosy that rots the skin from their legs and arms. He sleeps on the ground with a piece of plastic for a bed. Mud is everywhere and in the mountains it is cold, and like the cold nights, the loneliness penetrates to the bone. But a

transformation is taking place:

As if the mountains and the mud, the mud, and also the rain and the loneliness, as if all these things were cleansing us...

That is why we said that the genesis of the new person was in the FSLN. The new person began to be born with the fungus infections and... feet oozing worms; the new person began to be born with loneliness and eaten alive by mosquitos... That's the outer part, because inside, by dint of violent shocks day after day, the new person was being born with the freshness of the mountains. A person—it might seem incredible—but an open, un-egotistical person, no longer petty—a a tender person who sacrifices... for others, who suffers when others suffer and who also laughs when others laugh... You always cultivated that tenderness in the mountains. I took care not to lose my capacity for that beauty. The new person was born in the mountains.

~ Omar Cabezas, *Fire From the Mountains*, 87

Monimbo, 1978: The People Take the Lead

In the town of Masaya is the Indian barrio (neighborhood) called Monimbo. Speak the name Monimbo these days and you speak the name resistance. Benjamin "El Indio" Zeledon died there in 1912, at the hands of the U.S. troops. A few miles away is Niquinohomo, the birthplace of Sandino.

The people begin organizing masses and demonstrations protesting the death of *La Prensa* newspaper editor Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, assassinated by Somoza. On February 21,

thousands take to the streets to mark the anniversary of the death of Sandino. The National Guard launches an aerial attack on the crowd marching to the cemetery.

A series of sporadic attacks occurs in the next few days. The people erect barricades in the streets and Monimbo becomes a sea of red and black Sandinista flags. The make and throw *bombas de contacto*, weapons that will pas into the folklore of the revolution as symbols of the ingenuity and determination of a people.

Pedro Joaquin Chamorro

As the days pass, a single barrio takes on the accumulated power of the whole National Guard. Tanks, armored cars, helicopters, and heavy machine guns attack the people. They fight back with machetes, sticks, contact bombs, and stones. The National Guard attack some boys carrying Sandinista flags and cut off their hands with bayonets. Other children and adults cry out *Vive el frente Sandinista!* The Guard cuts their tongues out. The Guard attacks with brand-new rifles, M-16's given to them by the United States. Some of the Guard, ashamed of the killing, go to the side of the people. At the end of the battle, two hundred people—including children, lie dead.



Within days another barrio peopled by the Subtiava Indians erupts in insurrection. The indigenous are leading the people.

~ George Black, *Triumph of the People*, 113-114

Chinandega, 1978: Seizing the Land

The mobilization of the people is becoming a way of life. Rebellion spreads throughout Nicaragua. In Tonalá in the far north, the people seize the land. A peasant says,

This land is ours and we've taken it... so that we can work, so that we can live. The poison dust from the fumigation of the cotton fields is killing our pigs and chickens. At night, the place is alive with mosquitoes from the Standard Fruit Company's banana plantations... They poison us... women, children and old people. Either God will save Tonalá or we'll save it ourselves. Tonalá will be Nicaragua's second Monimbo.

It is.

~ George Black, *Triumph of the People*, 123

Managua, 1978: Strike at the Heart



Insurrection and the possibility of insurrection are everywhere. But the Sandinistas feel they need some bold action to galvanize the resistance. Keeping the tightest secrecy, three people plot “Operation Pigsty,” the taking of the National Palace in broad daylight and holding members of the House of Deputies hostage. With a total force of only twenty-six people, they choose the best combatants, who happen to average eighteen or nineteen years of age. They disguise themselves as National Guard troops, enter the National Palace, and pretend that Somoza himself is coming. The people inside hide in fear of the dictator, and before they realize that they have been tricked, the Sandinistas capture the whole House of Deputies. Somoza rings the building with Guard troops and orders a helicopter to fire on the building. When he learns some of his friends are inside he stops. The Sandinistas demand the release of their *companeras* in Somoza’s prisons, many of whom are being tortured. The siege lasts for forty-five hours. Somoza meets the demands. As the Sandinistas leave the National Palace, thousands of Nicaraguans line the streets, while others form a motorcade of cars, trucks and motorcycles. The red and black Sandinista *banderas* are everywhere.

In Matagalpa, the daring action has already had an effect. The city erupts in a spontaneous insurrection.

~ George Black, *Triumph of the People*, 124-126

Managua, 1979: Triumph of the Revolution

May 29: A three-hundred-person column of the famous *Frente Sur* (Southern Front) crosses the border from Costa Rica.

May 31: The FSLN calls for a national insurrection and general strike: *Heroic people of Nicaragua, the hour of the overthrow of the infamous dictator has come...*

June 4: The Sandinistas take Leon.

June 7: Somoza declares martial law and a state of siege.

June 9: The Managua insurrection begins.

June 16: The provisional government junta of National Resurrection is named, starting a parallel government in Nicaragua and preparing for the fall of Somoza.

July 2-6: Strategic cities fall to the Sandinistas.

July 16: Esteli barracks of the National Guard, the last military installation outside of Managua, falls.

July 17: Somoza resigns and leaves for Miami.

July 19: Radio Sandino awakens the country with sounds of victory—the Sandinista national anthem, slogans, folk songs. The new junta requests discipline, vigilance, and generosity to the defeated enemy. The people of Managua take over the city even before the troops arrive. They line the streets to greet the troops who are their sons and daughters, classmates whom they have not seen for years. It is like a family reunion with red and black flags covering the streets, the plaza which will soon be named after Carlos Fonseca. Pandemonium reigns.

The people have regained their memory and their voices. There is one name repeated over and over again, without fear of reprisal. Viva Sandino!

The people are reclaiming their history, their land, and a memory that is dangerous.

~ George Black, *Triumph of the People*, 155-157

Central American Resistance: Guatemala

First Invaders



Pedro Alvarado

Pedro Alvarado, the first Spanish invader in Guatemala, arrived in the early 1520s. Accompanying him were smallpox, influenza, and the bubonic plague. Up to one-third of the population of the highlands area died during this first epidemic alone. Other epidemics followed in 1545-1548 and 1576-1581. The disruption of the economic and social life due to disease alone was horrific.

Guatemalan historian Severo Martinez Palaez sums up the colonial period as a “regimen of terror for the Indians.” He writes, “What we must recognize [is that the cruel treatment of the Indians was not a sporadic phenomenon, but...inherent in the social structures of the colony, absolutely necessary to maintain subjected

to incredible forms of exploitation a mass of serfs with enormous numerical superiority.”
(Handy, 14-15)

The Killers: Disease, War, and Economics

Disease and war took their toll on the indigenous population during the first years of contact with the Spaniards. The economic systems that the Europeans established were equally devastating. The *encomienda* and *repartimiento* systems that prevailed in Peru, Bolivia, and Chile were also fundamental to Guatemala. Spanish wealth depended upon the exploited labor of the indigenous population.

The native-born Spaniards would not allow *criollos*, Spaniards born in Guatemala, to have any jobs other than that of *corregidor*, or managers of the estates. The tyranny and oppressive behavior of the *corregidores* was notorious throughout Guatemala. They robbed and exploited the indigenous population and became the objects of numerous revolts.

By 1750, attempts by the indigenous population to reclaim their communal practices and Mayan religion led to a number of revolts in outlying villages. The Catholic Church responded by trying to banish these “pagan” practices. Near the town of San Cristobal, the Tzotzil tribe

received inspiration from a young woman who said that the Virgin told her to eliminate the Spaniards. Two thousand people rose up in revolt.

After the death of Raphael Carrera, who led a successful revolt against the wealthy landowners, “liberal” reforms took most of the communal lands of the indigenous population. During the last part of the nineteenth century, Guatemalan economy became export-oriented, with control of the land in the hands of large plantation owners, ensuring vast fortunes for a few people. Tens of thousands of indigenous people lost their land. Dictatorship became the norm.

Coffee was king until the beginning of the twentieth century when large U.S. corporations either bought or were given huge tracts of land for bananas. These corporations benefited from lax regulations. The United Fruit Company, for example, did not have to pay taxes for twenty-five years.

Jorge Ubico became dictator in 1931. He regularly used repression to maintain power, registered all printing presses to cut down on the amount of opposition literature, militarized the public schools, and suggested to United Fruit that the daily wage of the peasants be reduced from seventy to thirty cents. United Fruit was only too happy to oblige. Ubico believed he was the reincarnation of Napoleon, and was so paranoid that he said he had no friends, just “domesticated enemies.”

Guatemala 1530-1648

Pangan, 1530: Beginning of the Tribute from the Annals of the Cakchiquel



Death of Pedro Alvarado

During this year heavy tribute was imposed. Gold was contributed to Tunatiuh [Pedro Alvarado]; 400 men and 400 women were delivered to him to be sent to wash gold. All the people extracted the gold. Four hundred men and 400 women were contributed to work in Pangan on the construction of the city, by order of Tunatiuh. At this we ourselves saw, oh, my sons!

Guatemala, 1560: The Plague

Plague victims

An anonymous Cakchiquel historian is shivering while writing. Fever overtakes the body, the enormity of destruction overtakes the mind. Both cause the body to quake. Writing it down... to remember...

Little by little it arrived here. In truth a fearful death fell on our heads... Many families [succumbed] to the plague. Now the people were overcome by intense cold and fever, blood came out of the noses, then came the cough growing worse and worse, the neck was twisted, and small and large sores broke out on them. The disease attacked everyone here. On the day of Circumcision [January 1, 1560], a Monday, while I was writing, I was attacked by the epidemic.



~ Jonathan Fried, et al., ed., *Guatemala in Rebellion: Unfinished History*, 15-16

Kingdom of Guatemala, 1648: The System of *Repartimiento*

In the 1540's and 1550's, the Dominicans removed the indigenous from their traditional homes and nearer to the Spanish settlements. In this way it was easier to use them for repartimiento labor. Thomas Gage, a Dominican friar, writes a century later what this "cheap and lazy way" of colonial living has done to the native population:

It would grieve a Christian's heart to see how by some cruel Spaniards in that week's service those poor wretches are wronged and abused [Indians were partitioned or "shared" by the week]; some visiting their wives at home, whilst their poor husbands are digging and delving; others whipping them for their slow working; others wounding them with their swords, or breaking their heads for some reasonable and well grounded reason in their own behalf; others stealing from their tools; others cheating them of half; others of all their wages...

~ Jonathan Fried, et al., ed., *Guatemala in Rebellion: Unfinished History*, 21

Archbishop Pedro Cortes y Larraz



Guatemala 1769-1838

Guatemala, 1769: Eighteenth Century Colonialism

Archbishop Pedro Cortes y Larraz has been sent by the Spanish king to investigate the conditions of the indigenous people. In his report back to the king he writes;

This partitioning of Indians for labor service is done with great violence, without respect for the Indian's own need to work his land, or for his own health, or life...

...they have experienced two years of calamitous starvation because of which many have died and many have fled the villages. Many have also died spinning cotton which the Spanish administrator makes the Indian women do all year long so they cannot do anything for their

families...

The truth is, that at whoever's command, these wretched Indians are tied to the whipping post; men, women, young and old, they are whipped with excessive cruelty, sometimes without any reason at all, and almost always for things which they would not be whipped for if they were not Indians...

Of this cruelty I cannot produce greater evidence except to say that frequently enough I hear screams and cries from my room or inn even though the beatings are taking place at a great distance...

~ Jonathan Fried, et al., ed., *Guatemala in Rebellion: Unfinished History*, 23

Guatemala City, 1838: Revolt from the Mountains

On February 1, the rebel forces of Raphael Carrera march into Guatemala City, and the Spanish and *ladinos* cover behind their doors. They have been taught that the "Indians" are "savages," so they expect the worst. The four thousand rebels are wearing green bushes in their hats so

they look like a *moving forest*. The rebels treat the population well, only wanting their basic rights.

Carrera and the rebels are protesting the “liberal reforms” that, from the perspective of the local village, only mean more taxes and less land. At first, Carrera leaves the politicians in power, but by 1839 he sees the interest of the indigenous are not being met. He triumphantly re-enters Guatemala City in that year and assumes the presidency until his death in 1865.

This is the only time in the history of Guatemala, that peasants, *ladinos*, and the indigenous are able to effect legislation in their own interests.

~ See Jim Handy, *Gift of the Devil*, 34-54

Guatemala City 1944-1954

1944: Ubico Flees



A new generation of students has had enough of Ubico’s dictatorship. Under Ubico, Guatemala has been sold to U.S. corporations like United Fruit and the Great White Fleet. At the University of San Carlos an association of students protests the tyranny and organizes a series of strikes. Ubico strikes back, saying, *While I am president, I will not grant liberty of press nor of association, because the people of Guatemala are not prepared for democracy...* The students up the pressure and Ubico resigns, but a military group takes over and refuses to allow elections.

Students and professionals organize the Civic Union and plan a general strike. The junta arrests their leaders. Finally the Honor Guard of the Military School joins the students in a bloody battle that chases the junta from power.

~ Jim Handy, *Gift of the Devil*, 104-5

Guatemala City, 1954: Bitter Fruit



Castillo Armas

The United States Information Agency (USIA) is ready to lie itself into history. They launch a sophisticated propaganda campaign designed to destabilize the government of Jacobo Arbenz. They distribute thousands of pamphlets and cartoons to newspapers and others ridiculing the Guatemalan government. They produce three movies on communism in Guatemala. A clandestine radio undertakes a classic disinformation campaign. *Our job is to intimidate listeners...* Panic and fear spread inside Guatemala.

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) prepares and arms Castillo Armas with 170 mercenaries. The CIA calls them the *Liberation Army*. When they finally cross the border into Guatemala, the people do not support them and they quickly lose ground. The people do not want them. The United States does not let the will of the people or reality get in their way. The CIA and the USIA fabricate their own reality.

First they tell Castillo Armas not to move or engage in any battles. CIA pilots then leaflet Guatemala City, telling the people how the Liberation Army is winning great victories. One CIA propaganda chief says, Now is the time for the big lie. CIA radio broadcasts tell of the advance of two non-existent columns of troops, complete with face conversations between two imaginary commanders. Frightened Guatemalans flee the city until it is almost a ghost town.

The CIA, with the help of the U.S. embassy, spreads rumors that a non-existent cruiser and an imaginary aircraft carrier are off the coast of Guatemala. Jacobo Arbenz and the people of Guatemala are the victims of two months of psychological warfare. Believing that thousand of people will be killed, Arbenz steps down as president to save lives. As he leaves the national palace he addresses the nation:

The Untied Fruit Company, in collaboration with the governing circles of the United States, is responsible for what is happening to us...

In whose name have they carried out these barbarous acts? What is their banner? We know very well. They have used the pretext of anti-communism. The truth is very different. The truth is to be found in the financial interests of the fruit company and the other U.S. monopolies which have invested great amounts of money in Latin America and fear that the example of Guatemala would be followed by other Latin American countries...

Years of Spring



Jorge Ubico

Led by students, the people overthrew Ubico in 1944. What followed has been called ten years of spring in Guatemala, the only significant time in this century when there was truly civilian rule. Juan Jose Arevalo was elected president with eighty-five percent of the vote. He was a profession, rather than a politician.

Calling his plan “spiritual socialism,” Arevalo instituted a number of political reforms that affected Guatemala City more than the countryside. A social security law and a labor code protecting the rights of workers were two of his accomplishments. He did not attempt to change the distribution of the land for fear of being overthrown by the military and wealthy landowners.

However, his successor, Jacobo Arbenz, did finally institute a mild land reform that bought the vacant lands from their owners at a fair market value and distributed them to landless peasants. The 1950 census showed that two percent of the population controlled seventy-four percent of arable land. Seventy-six percent of the population owned only nine percent of the land. The Agrarian Reform Law of Arbenz’s government, by shifting land away from the largest owners to one hundred thousand peasants, changed the economic structure of Guatemala more than any other event in the previous century.

Part of the expropriation of land hit the United Fruit Company. The Guatemalan government bought unused land of United Fruit for the value they had put down on their tax returns for the last ten years. Company owners were outraged, saying the land was more valuable and they needed it in case something happened to their other land.

Voice of a Mountain is a video documentary of the lives of rural Guatemalan coffee farmers who took up arms against their government in a civil war that lasted 36 years. This documentary explores Guatemala's dark history from the perspective of those who saw armed revolution as their only hope for change in a poverty-ridden nation under years of military dictatorship. Ex-combatants talk about the bleak reality of the country that led to their involvement in the war, and the response of genocide from the Guatemalan government against its people. The documentary gives insight into their motives for joining an armed conflict as interviews reveal personal accounts of struggle, hope, tragedy, and the fruits of their resistance.

End of Spring



Allen Dulles

They cried to their connections in the highest reaches of the U.S. government that communism was taking over in this hemisphere in Guatemala. John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State, and Allan Dulles, his brother, head of the Central Intelligence Agency, hatched a plot for a CIA-directed invasion of Guatemala.

The CIA armed a man called Castillo Armas and trained a small band of fighters in Nicaragua. The CIA then manipulated the media in Guatemala to such an extent that the people, including Arbenz himself, thought that a huge conquering army was entering Guatemala. The CIA-backed coup overthrew Arbenz; thirty years of military dictatorships followed.

Continued Repression

The late 1970s and early 1980s were periods of un-imaginable repression in Guatemala. Under generals like Lucas Garcia and Rios Montt, the Guatemalan army committed at least 225 Indian village massacres. Not coincidentally, those are also areas of Guatemala's greatest mineral wealth, including oil reserves.

Since 1954, the Guatemalan military has killed one hundred thousand people. Presently, there are forty thousand disappeared, people presumed dead but whose bodies have never been found. Families of the disappeared don't know whether their relative is dead or alive.



Jose Rios Montt

In 1962, the first guerrilla group was founded to struggle against the oppressive conditions that the military and wealthy landowners created. In 1982, several guerrilla groups united under the URNG, the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity.

“Who in your family has disappeared?”

“My father, Rigoberto, My brother, Maynor, My brother, Otto, My brother, Armando, My uncle Moises, My uncle Salomon, My aunt, Lilian, My aunt Elizabeth, My aunt, Sipirana, My cousin, Damaris, My cousin Maria, My cousin, Hector, My cousin, Noe, My cousin, Abigail, My cousin, Claudia.”

~ Jean-Marie Simon, *Guatemala*, 195

Guatemalan Highlands, 1979: Torture

Rigoberta Menchu, one of the leaders of the Guatemalan resistance, tells of the most painful experience of her life.

One of my brothers was a catechist. The other was secretary for a cooperative in the village; that was his only crime. They kidnapped him, and he spent days in the hands of the army, who tortured him. He was only 14 years old. They ripped off his fingernails, cut out his tongue, they destroyed the soles of his feet and burned his skin. I saw him with my own eyes and will never forget it!



...At 8:00 a.m. a military truck arrived. They made about 20 men get off the truck; men who no longer looked human, and among them was my little brother. It was hard to identify him.... He was so disfigured...

They lined up the prisoners, dressed up like soldiers... They hit them with their rifle butts to make them stand, but they would just fall down again. When [the

captain] gave the order to undress them, they had to cut the uniforms because the blood from the wounds bade the uniforms stick to their bodies... They tied them and piled them up together, then the captain ordered his soldiers to pour gasoline over them and set them on fire. I was looking at my brother. He didn't die right away, nor did the others. Some screamed; others could no longer breathe so they didn't scream, but their bodies were writhing. Unfortunately, there is no water in our villages, so we couldn't put out the fire that was burning them. When water arrived it, was too late.

I am no longer the owner of my small existence; the world I live in is so cruel, so blood-thirsty, that it is going to annihilate me at any moment. Therefore, the only thing I can do is struggle... if I fight, it is to be treated like a human being...

This is what I can give as testimony... If I have narrated my life, if I have taken this opportunity, it's because I know that my people cannot tell their story; but it's no different than mine. I am not the only orphan...

~ Rigoberta Menchu, *I.... Rigoberta Menchu*, 198-201

Spanish Embassy, Guatemala City, 1980: Massacre

"Who in your family has disappeared?"

*"My father, Rigoberto,
My brother, Maynor,
My brother, Otto,
My brother, Armando,
My uncle, Moises,
My uncle, Salomon,
My aunt, Lilian,
My aunt, Elizabeth,
My aunt, Sipirana,
My cousin, Damaris,
My cousin, Maria,
My cousin, Hector,
My cousin, Noe,
My cousin, Abygail,
My cousin, Claudia."*

~ Jean-Marie Simon, *Guatemala*, 195

The occupation and village massacres by the army in El Quiche province have provoked the people to action. They send 130 campesinos to Guatemala City to raise the issue publicly. No one will listen to them. Out of desperation they take over two radio stations. The government warns that they are guerrillas and not to be trusted. Again cut off from raising public awareness, they occupy the Spanish Embassy. Their plan is to occupy the embassy peacefully in order to demand the removal of the army from El Quiche. The dictator, Lucas Garcia, tells his henchmen to take them out.

Guatemalan police surround the embassy, throwing grenades. Inside, the twenty-nine peasants and other visitors take refuge in the ambassador's office. Lucas Garcia says, *Set them on fire*. The police lock the door and throw fire bombs.

From the streets below, the people see thirty-nine human beings writhing and dying, burning. Vicente Menchu, the father of Rigoberta, is burned alive. She says, *The only thing left were their ashes... What hurt me very, very much was the lives of so many compañeras, fine compañeras who weren't ambitious for power in the least. All they wanted was enough to live on, enough to meet their people's needs. This reinforced my decision to fight.*

Thousands risk death and flood the streets of Guatemala City in the funeral procession honoring the people who died in the Spanish Embassy. Within days a new opposition group is organized called the Vicente Menchu Brigade. Rigoberta joins it. Her father had said: *Some have to give their blood and some have to give their strength; so while we can, we'll give our strength.*

~ Jonathan Fried, et al, editors, Guatemala in Rebellion, 204-206,
and Rigoberta Menchu, I...Rigoberta Menchu, 185

Guatemala City, 1984: GAM Begins

They gather in the house of the Archbishop. Twenty-five of them in a circle, each one stands and tells the story of their disappeared relatives. The air is thick with sadness. Two of them had met at the morgue. Nineth de Garcia is one fo the founders fo the Mutual Support Group (Grupo Apoyo Mutuo, or GAM) for relatives of the disappeared. Her husband Fernando was abducted three months before. But this group is not being formed simply to hold hands. They are supporting each other to protest the injustice of the disappearances.

They hold a press conference. They make the crimes public and lay blame on the government and military. They seek international support and protection.

In spite of threatening phone calls and the assassination of several of their leaders, GAM members remain public in their denunciations.

~ See Americas Watch: *Guatemala: The Group for Mutual Support*

The Sierra, 1991: Communities of the Population in Resistance

They are not from one village or ethnic group. They are *ixiles, chiquimultecos, quiches, aquacatecos*. They have fled from the Guatemalan army and its massacres, tortures, pillage, disappearances. They have seen their crops and houses burned, cadavers eaten by dogs, villages bombed by planes and helicopters. As one says, *nine years of persecution, nine years of destruction, nine years of resistance*. They live in the mountains, they carry no weapons, and they call themselves the Communities of the Population in Resistance (CPR).

They create their own democracy. There are committees, *responsables* (responsible ones), and an assembly open to all the people. Everybody comes, including the children. One boy stands with a festering sore covering the left side of his head. The army denies medicine to the community. *All of our children were born here in the mountains, on top of the mud, under violent storms, without covering; therefore, there is much illness because we are unaccustomed to this.*

So many of the murdered and disappeared are husbands and fathers. *We widows have learned to work. We work our land with a machete. We widows have double work. We work the land with out children on our backs. We cut our wood; we bring our water; we cook our food.*

Many of the women wear the traditional Mayan dress of their town. They themselves weave the bright reds and deep purples and blacks into *trajes* and headbands. It is an art centuries old passed on from generation to generation. The symbols woven in the clothing recount the history of their people. These women become the artists and the bearers of dangerous memory.

~ See Informe de la Comisión Multipartita, CPR

El Salvador 1931-1932

San Salvador, 1931: Farabundo Marti

Two years ago Farabundo Marti returned to El Salvador. On the streets of the capital he found ox carts of the people mingling with Pierce Arrows and Packards of the oligarchs. The price has dropped out fo the coffee market, and unrest among the workers is spreading. Military repression increases and Marti leads a protest march. He is arrested and sent to the Central Penitentiary where he begins a month-long hunger strike. Massive demonstration in his support force the government to release him. He emerges as a national hero and symbol of the opposition to the repressive conditions. Protest demonstrations increase and the police and military kill dozen of protestors. The government is chasing Marti all over the countryside

because they hold him responsible for all their trouble. In a military coup General Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez comes to power. He believes it is worse to kill an ant than a human being.

He will soon act on that belief.

~ Robert Armstrong and Janet Shenk, *El Salvador: The Face of Revolution*, 21-25

Coffee and Unrest

El Salvador is the smallest country in Central America, about the size of Massachusetts, yet it has the densest population. As in Guatemala, coffee is king. Fourteen families have controlled the wealth and power in this country for several generations.

In the period from 1930 to 1932 there was general unrest among the peasants. The lack of land coupled with an economic depression left most people without food or a livelihood. The Communist Party began organizing actively. Farabundo Marti, a Salvadoran who had served as Sandino's personal secretary and lieutenant, returned to El Salvador to help organize an insurrection.

Salvadoran Countryside, 1932: *La Matanza*

The insurrection is planned for January 22. The authorities find out and arrest Farabundo Marti on the 18th. Mass arrests begin. In the countryside the peasants do not know and so the revolt moves forward. Years, generations, and even centuries of abuse create the long fuse that is finally lit. The rebellion is strongest in the coffee growing areas, the indigenous leading the way.

Mostly armed with machetes and stones, they are up against rifles and machine guns. "Red Julia" leads a force of five thousand near Sonsonate. Martinez mobilizes his forces to crush the rebellion. the rebels' arms are no match for the weapons of the army, but they fight on for days.

Wave after wave brave a hail of bullets. Finally, they are defeated.

The ruling class is outraged and cries for vengeance, and the *matanza* begins. In Izalco, groups of fifty, thumbs tied together, meet their death against the wall of a church before a firing squad. Victims dig mass graves, and when they are finished a machine gun fills their bodies with lead and the graves with bodies. Miguel Mármol, one of the leaders in the Salvadoran Communist Party, later writes:

General Ochoa... made everyone who had been captured crawl on their knees to where he was seated in a chair in the courtyard of the fort and he said to them: "Come here and smell my gun," the prisoners pleaded with him in the name of God and their children, having heard the intermittent shots before entering the courtyard. But the General insisted. "If you don't smell my pistol then you are a communist and afraid. He who is without sin knows no fear."

The campesino smelled the barrel of the gun, and in that instant, the general would put a bullet in his face. "Bring the next one in," he said.

The Salvadoran ruling class and military kill thirty thousand people--two percent of the population.

~ Robert Armstrong and Janet Shenk, *El Salvador: The Face of Revolution*, 28-30

Economic Disaster

The same issues facing the people in 1930 face the vast majority today. Lack of basic human needs, like running water, electricity, clean water, access to the land, have remained constant for fifty years.

In the early years of the century, coffee was like gold in terms of the disruption it caused in the lives of the indigenous. In the late nineteenth century communal lands were abolished by decree and large coffee *fincas* (plantations) were created. The peasants who were shoved off the land had to work on the *fincas* for intolerable wages. Coffee as an export crop meant that the profits from its sale enriched the owners of the *fincas* but did not raise the standard of living of the workers. Since so much land was used to cultivate coffee for export, there was little left for subsistence crops for domestic consumption.

Protests in the coffee fields grew in 1930. On May Day of that year, eighty thousand workers and peasants marched into San Salvador, demanding a minimum wage for farmworkers and relief centers for the unemployed. In the rural areas, regular armed skirmishes between the army and peasants occurred.

By 1992 the opposition forces were ready for a general insurrection set for January 22. Betrayal led to the arrest of Marti and other leaders. They tried to call off the insurrection, but those in the total areas did not know how to stop the momentum. Thousands of farmworkers and peasants, primarily indigenous, stoned government offices, occupied city halls, and set fire to the houses of the rich.

General Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez, who had overthrown the elected government the year before, crushed the rebellion. Within weeks the army, the wealthy landowners, and

paramilitary forces carried out a massacre that killed thirty thousand. Peasant leaders were hanged in the town square to deter future rebellions.

San Salvador 1975

Salvadoran Kent State

On July 30, students from the San Salvador National University stage a protest march against the army's invasion of a branch campus. In Latin America the neutrality and safety of a university is nearly sacred. The student marchers go up 25th Street heading for the highway bridge just south of the U.S. Embassy. As they enter the bridge, soldiers take up offensive positions on the other side, blocking their advance. Not wanting to risk a confrontation, they turn around, only to see more soldiers blocking their exit. The soldiers open fire on the unarmed students. Some jump off the bridge, others lie flat. In a few moments, the army kills twenty students.

With complete orchestration, military ambulances pick up the bodies, some still alive.

Immediately following are the street sweepers washing the blood away. None of the twenty are ever heard from again. the military says, "What massacre?"

~ See Robert Armstrong and Janet Shenk, *El Salvador: The Face of Revolution*, 73-74

Church Reform

Throughout Latin America, the 1960s brought tremendous changes within the church. For centuries the Catholic Church had sided with the wealthy against the poor. The church blessed the theft of lands and perpetuated the miserable conditions of the indigenous, saying that God meant them to be poor but they would get their reward in heaven.

There were, of course some notable exception to this trend, including Bartolome de Las Casas and Bishop Antonio Valdivieso, both of whom defended the indigenous, and Father Miguel Hidalgo, who was a leader in the Mexican independence movement. But for the most part, the institutional church was one of the main forms of cultural invasion in Latin America that stripped the native population of their gods, their dignity, and their very lives.

In 1963, after the second Vatican Council met, Pope John XXIII wrote an encyclical entitled *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth) that led the way for priests, nuns, and lay leaders to see organizing for justice as a fundamental tenet of the Christian faith. The 1968 conference of

Latin American bishops in Medellin, Colombia, further confirmed this direction, and the movement known as liberation theology began.

One of the great decisions of the conference was that the church would "make a preferential option for the poor": the church would actively take the side of the poor and begin to view the world from their perspective.

In Latin America, priests and nuns left the safe confines of rectories and convents to actually live with the poor. They realized the daily injustices and indignities suffered by the poor at the hands of the rich. They read the Bible as a group and discovered together that God did not intend people to live in humiliating poverty.

All God's children deserved basic human rights of food, clothing, shelter and access to the land. The church began organizing cooperatives so that small farmers could get higher prices for their goods, helped organize land takeovers because the children of the campesinos were dying while the rich were growing weeds on their vacant land, and supported unions demanding better wages and working conditions.

All these actions were so threatening to those in power that the church itself became the target of repression. Catechists, priests, and nuns were kidnapped, tortured, and killed. The powerful considered the Bible a "subversive document".

San Salvador, 1975: Remembering

Blood can be washed from a bridge. Washing away the memory of those students proves impossible.

As word spreads of the massacre, hundreds converge on the cathedral in the capitol. Gathering both spontaneously and as the fruit of years of organizing, the diverse groups proclaim that *unity is our strength*. They shout *El Pueblo unido, jamás sera vencido!* (The people united will never be defeated!) Today they take a new name that reflects their unity. They call themselves the People's Revolutionary Bloc (BPR) which becomes known as *El Bloque*.

Composed of a variety of popular organizations, they offer the people an alternative to corrupt political parties. Emphasizing democracy, equality, and civil disobedience, they fight for higher wages, land for the landless, electricity for poor neighborhoods. They hate the oligarchy and the army. They simply pledge to end their rule.

~ See Robert Armstrong and Janet Shenk, *El Salvador: The Face of Revolution*, 73-74

Aguilares, 1977: Option for the Poor

God is not somewhere up in the clouds, lying on a hammock. God is here with us, building a kingdom here on Earth.

Father Rotilio Grande has brought the new theology of liberation to the poor communities of Aguilares, a town of ten thousand. Now a pastor near his birthplace of El Paisnal, he awakens the campesinos to their dignity. They are worth more than the \$1.75 a day they get from the rich plantation owners. They are worth more than the rocky land they are forced to rent.

Government informers spy on his sermons. On March 12, he takes the parish jeep to drive to his birthplace to say mass. With him are two friends and three children. On a lonely stretch of the road he noticed that he is being followed. The car overtakes them and fires. Father Rotilio is shot twelve times by 9mm. armor-plated dum dum bullets from Mantzer automatic rifles, the kind issued to police. One campesino is killed in the barrage of bullets. The other is found with a bullet in his forehead fired at point-blank range. The three children escape to tell the story.

~ William J. O'Malley, *The Voice of Blood*, 43-46

Escalon, 1977: Being Patriots

In the plush neighborhood of Escalon, a flyer circulates throughout the summer: *Be a Patriot, Kill a Priest.*

In July, the White Warriors Union, a right-wing death squad, sends this note:

All Jesuits without exception must leave the country forever within thirty days... If our order is not obeyed within the indicated time, the immediate and systematic execution of those Jesuits who remain in the country will proceed until we have finished with all of them.

~ Robert Armstrong and Janet Shenk, *El Salvador: The Face of Revolution*, 94

Increase in Repression

The repression was particularly acute in El Salvador. During the 1970s Father Rotilio Grande organized peasants in Aguilares and trained campesinos as Delegates of the Word, leaders of liturgical services.

The emphasis among these leaders was one of service and collective leadership. At the same time, popular organizations were organizing throughout El Salvador. In 1977 the conflict came to a head. Security forces murdered Father Rotilio Grande and arrested, tortured, and expelled priests. A right-wing terrorist organization threatened to kill every Jesuit in the country. That was also the year that Oscar Romero was named archbishop of El Salvador.

The stealing of elections was common in El Salvador, so the vast majority of people had no hope in an electoral system filled with fraud. The popular organizations and then the guerrilla groups were the only hope most of the people had for fundamental change in El Salvador. The popular organizations were composed of peasants, workers, teachers, and students who were engaging in nonviolent actions to bring about change. These actions included demonstrations, land occupations, and strikes. The government responded with greater and greater violence and repression.

In 1980 the repression reached another height when Archbishop Oscar Romero was assassinated while saying mass and four North American church women were raped and murdered on their way from the airport. In all, ten thousand civilians were murdered that year, the vast majority by right-wing death squads and government security forces.

Since then, seventy thousand civilians have been killed in El Salvador, most at the hands of their own government--a government which has received over four billion dollars in U.S. military and economic aid during those years. The year 1980 also saw the escalation of the guerrilla movement, fueled by the government's killing of opposition leaders and students demonstrating in the streets.

San Salvador 1980: Romero's Last Homily

Decapitated bodies lie in the streets every morning. Heads are found on poles along country roads. A business will one day develop selling heads at exorbitant prices to grieving families who want to unite the bodies of their loved ones for burial. Ten bodies a day appear as mothers gather with their small pictures of their sons or daughters outside the morgue.

Oscar Romero had been the oligarchy's choice for archbishop three years ago. But he had a conversion. The murder of his friend Rotilio Grance started it, but the people completed it. He sees into the humble lives of his flock and has gained courage to speak out. He writes a letter to President Carter: *If you want to defend human rights... [then] guarantee that your government will not intervene directly or indirectly, with military, economic, diplomatic, or other pressure determining the Salvadoran people's destiny.*

And now as he stands in the Cathedral he addresses the army directly:

Brothers: you are part of our own people... God's law must prevail that says: Thou shalt not kill! No soldier is obligated to obey an order against the law of God... It is time to take back your consciences... In the name of God, and in the name of the suffering people, whose laments rise to heaven each day more tumultuous, I beg you, I beseech you, I order you in the name of God: Stop the repression!

Five times the applause of the people who love him so dearly interrupt him. He has to shout the last sentence as the cheering of the people lifts his words to heaven.

~ James Brockman, *Romero: A Life*, 241-42

San Salvador 1980: The Shepherd Murdered

It is March 24 and Romero is tired. So many depending upon him for strength. Some try to dissuade him from saying the Mass at the hospital because it was publicized in the newspapers and there have been threats against his life. He has refused bodyguards because he says the people can't have them. He wants to share the fate of the campesinos.

He begins Mass and reads from the Gospel: *Unless the grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains only a grain. But if it dies it bears much fruit...* He takes the body and blood of Christ and begins to pray. A bullet from a gun with a silencer pierces his chest. Blood pours from his mouth and nose. Some of the people rush up. They carry him to a hospital where he dies without regaining consciousness.

On a much earlier occasion he said, *If I die, I will rise again in the Salvadoran people.*

~ James Brockman, *Romero: A Life*, 244-45

San Salvador 1980: Adelante

Members of the FDR and opposition groups decide to return to El Salvador. They are meeting at the Jesuit High School to plan a press conference. Two hundred police surround the building.

Men in plain clothes and guns kidnap the five FDR leaders. It is the work of the Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez Brigade, named after the general of the *matanza*. Recently, they decapitated four young men, leaving their bodies on the Avenida España with a note: *Long live El Salvador! Long live the massacre of 1932!*

Five bodies are found on the shores of Lake Ilopango. Enrique Alvarez's left arm is missing. Juan Chacón's face is mutilated, his left fist clenched in defiance above his head as if to encode in his body in death, the very essence of his life: *Adelante! Forward!*

~ See Robert Armstrong and Janet Shenk, *El Salvador: The Face of Revolution*

San Jose, Costa Rica, 1980: Last Resort

It is May and on the stage of the theater stands the whole spectrum of Salvadoran society. On one end is Enrique Alvarez, a member of one of the fourteen families, now president of the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR). Rejecting his wealth and family breeding, he has joined the people's struggle. On the other end is Juan Chacon, leader of *El Bloque*. A field hand and factory worker, Juan remembers his father, killed and dismembered by the National Guard for being a Delegate of the Word in the church.

Alvarez announces to the crowd:

The Salvadoran people have had to take up arms to end the conditions we have been subjected to for the last fifty years-- by military governments, by the oligarchy and U.S. imperialism. The people have risen in arms to say "Enough" and to take power the only way they leave us, the way of armed struggle.

The name of this new guerrilla army, a coalition of various forces, is the Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation (FMLN). Another name of a fallen hero takes its place in the continuing resistance of the people.

~ Robert Armstrong and Janet Shenk, *El Salvador: The Face of Revolution*, 168

San Salvador: The 1990s

As the 1990s began, the FMLN gained control of much of the countryside and showed their ability to carry out an effective armed struggle in the capitol itself. In 1991, the United Nations began mediating negotiations between the Salvadoran government and the Guerrilla forces.

Guerrilla demands included a purging of the armed forces of those guilty of human rights violations and the integration of FMLN militants into either armed forces or the police.

San Salvador, 1991: The Struggle Continues

The united people have not been defeated. The guerrilla army has fought the Salvadoran military to a standstill. Even though the Salvadoran military has received over four billion dollars in U.S. military and economic aid in the past decade, the FMLN and the popular organizations have something more important--the people.

More than seventy thousand civilians have been killed, the vast majority by government forces and right-wing death squads. the cost has been incredible, but the determination to continue the struggle is even more incredible. Liberated zones are everywhere.

Resistance Today: Rainforest

In the Amazon today, the invasion of 1492 is being re-enacted. the Brazilian rainforest, or Amazon jungle, is the last remaining territory in the Western Hemisphere that has not been totally invaded by white Europeans.

Pará, Amazon Valley, 1976: King Fires

A fire as big as the state of Thode Island rages out of control. The A.G. Ranch, a subsidiary of th King Ranch of Texas, is clearing more land. the fire is so intense that it creates its own thunder, lightning, and mini-tornadoes. A land rush of poor migrants looking for survival outside the poverty-stricken cities clears more and more land until much fo the area is like a wasteland.

Without the forest the tappers cannot make a living and the indigenous cannot live. Without land the small farmers cannot survive. The large plantation owners live off the misery of all of those groups. The only hope for the tappers and indigenous is to organize.

~ See Alex Shoumatoff, *The World Is Burning*, 55

Treasure, Imagined and Real

It's not that Europeans haven't tried to take over the Amazon. Inspired by the legends of El Dorado, the magnificent City of Gold, conquistadors from Portugal, Spain, and The Netherlands, France, and Britain all lusted for the lush riches.

No one ever found the City of Gold, but the Amazon itself is a world treasure. It contains billions of dollars of mahogany and cedar, eight to sixteen billion tons of iron ore deposits, gold, bauxite (essential in making aluminum), limestone, nickel, copper, manganese and seventy-eight percent of the world's supply of niobium. By 1988 approximately eight to ten percent of the rainforests of the Amazon had been cleared. The fate of the rest of the forest is the modern-day counterpart of the invasion of 1942 and the resistance to it.

There were many attempts to invade the forest, enslave the indigenous, and extract its bounty for profit. The familiar pattern of white disease, greed, and inhumanity occurred in the Amazon as well as everywhere else in the hemisphere. Only two hundred thousand Amazonian indigenous have survived from an estimated total of six to twelve million present in 1942.

Seringal Santa Fe, 1976: *Empate*

Wilson Pinheiro, head of the rubber tapper's union, creates a new tactic in the struggle to save the forest from being cleared and burned. The tappers learn about a clearing taking place on the plantation of Jorge Horacio. Forty tappers, all unarmed, stand in the way of the bulldozers.

The workers doing the clearing, many of them as poor as the tappers, stop. It is an *empate*, a standoff.

In the next five years they organize forty-five *empates*. Chico Mendes adds another element, brings in women and children too to stand in front of the bulldozers and chain saws. When they hear of a part of the forest that is being cleared, they round up everyone and form a wall on the edge of the land. Even the *pistoleiros*, the hired guns, do not dare shoot. In all of the *empates* four hundred are arrested, a few are killed, some are tortured, but they succeed in saving three million hectares of the forest from being destroyed. Chico says, *Thirty of our blockades failed and fifteen worked, but it was worth it.*

~ Alex Shoumatoff, *The World Is Burning*, 67

The Carajas and Others

For example, the Caraja tribe, living close to the Amazon River, experienced smallpox epidemics in 1812 and 1817 after contact with white men.

The French explorers described the Caraja as excellent crafts-people, fine weavers of cotton, and artisans with feathers. They had a beautiful and expressive ritual life and they had made agricultural areas out of the jungle, a feat which defies modern techniques. In the early

nineteenth century there were fifty-seven thousand Caraja. By 1991 they were reduced to one thousand who now serve as tourist guides and sell their crafts at airports.

The Brazilian indigenous tribes had been destroyed between 1900 and 1957. Many of the surviving tribes were on the verge of extinction. In 1967, a government investigation found that tribes were being massacred through dynamite, machine guns, and poisoned sugar, and deliberately infested with smallpox, tuberculosis, and measles germs.

And yet the forest and the people have survived to a greater degree than any other region or people in the hemisphere, due to a tradition of indigenous and worker resistance, as well as the massive burgeoning jungle, so full of life and growth, which has defied human destruction.

The 1980's

The Amazon, 1980: The Historical Actors

Four distinct groups living in the rainforest at the present time are the main actors in this historical drama:

Indigenous: two hundred thousand are defending their land, culture, and lives.

Garimpeiros: three to five hundred thousand miners, often portrayed as the villains, murdering the indigenous, polluting the rivers and lands. They are in turn victimized by the Brazilian economy and practices of the development "miracle" that made it impossible for them to make a living as farmers or in the crowded cities.

Extractors: two million--while keeping the forests intact they harvest nuts, rubber, resins, palm products, and medicines. The forests that they depend upon and they themselves are under attack. As gathered, they have been the base of the Amazon economy for five centuries.

Settlers: two to three million drawn by government promises of land and loans. Some are adventurers, others simply trying to survive. They are refugees from the general economic devastation of Brazil.

~ See Susan Hecht and Alexander Cockburn, *The Fate of the Forest: Developers, Destroyers and Defenders of the Amazon*, 164-178

Acre, Brazil, 1988: Chico, the Man

Chico Mendes has cut rubber full-time for twenty-eight years. Since 1980 he has been full-time head of the union of rubber tappers. He still spends hours playing with his two children, Sandino, named after the Nicaraguan hero, and Elenira, named after a Brazilian guerrilla leader.

I became an ecologist long before I ever heard the word. The tappers take from the forest what can be replenished. They know that the forest is their partner, their sustenance. Devour it and the source of life is gone. Take what is given and there will be more tomorrow.

The tappers love him. The middlemen and plantation owners hate him. Chico hates violence. He pleads against it, *I don't believe in bodies.* The tappers say, *he never [gets] mad at anybody... he never [gets] a thing for himself.* He has a magnetic presence and a real way with words.

~ Alex Shoumatoff, *The World is Burning*, 8, 23, 28, 29

The Capitalist Miracle

But resistance and defiance, on the one hand, and final victory, on the other, are two different things. Unfortunately, the destruction is escalating. The increase can be traced to 1964 when a military coup installed a dictatorship that promised to provide a "capitalist miracle" for Brazil. With advice from the staunchest capitalists in the United States and internationally, the military generals embarked on a campaign to make the rainforest profitable.

First, the generals destroyed the peasant leagues and outlawed all strikes. The please foreigners, they passed laws that required minimum wages for workers and health benefits, but these laws were never enforced. In order to keep meat and food prices down while continuing major export of beef, the generals opened the Amazon to "development." Called Operation Amazon, the program gave tax breaks and investment credits to investors. The onslaught of fortune seekers drove the indigenous off the land they had held for centuries, bulldozed forests, and burned the valuable Brazil nut trees. Guns, threats, and the ever-present legal document led the charge.

Twenty thousand Brazilian soldiers trained in counter-insurgency warfare wiped out the communist guerrillas, who mobilized to stop the destruction. The generals developed a new slogan: "A land without men for men without land." The themes and ideologies of the first invasion were being repeated. The idea that the land was vacant and that the indigenous were not human have the invasion its moral right to proceed without concern for the fate of the people or of nature.

Settlers flooded in, some buying the land, others grabbing it through fraud or intimidation. The small settlers eventually failed because the larger economic forces of capitalism favored the large landowners who snapped up the land of the failed small farmers. In a third of the cases, the large land owners used threats and violence to run the small farmers off.

New York, 1988: Fire

The headlines of the *New York Times* scream out a warning:

Vast Amazon Fires, Man-made, Linked to Global Warming

Satellite studies of Amazon fires in 1987 finally make the international news a year later. The mathematics of destruction are almost inconceivable:

- eight thousand fires per day in the Amazon;
- two hundred thousand square kilometers of forest burned;
- the fires may account for one-tenth of all man-made carbon dioxide (five hundred million tons), the cause of the greenhouse effect and global warming;
- smoke clouds rising to twelve thousand feet.

Marlise Simons, the *Times* reporter, writes: *From the flames, tons of fumes and particles are hurled into the sky...and at night the forest looks to be at war.*

~ Alex Shoumatoff, *The World is Burning*, 127, 128

Chicago, 1988: Indigenous Fight Back

Paulino Paiakan is Kayapo militant who speaks before the World Bank and international audiences to stop the destruction of the forest, to stop the building of dams, and to gain recognition for the rights of the indigenous. At the University of Chicago he says:

The forest is one big thing; it has people, animals and plants. There is no point in saving the animals if the forest is burned down; there is no point in saving the forest if the people and the animals who live in it are killed or driven away. The groups trying to save the races of animals cannot win the people trying to save the forest lose; the people trying to save the Indians cannot win without the help for the Indians, who know the forest and the animals and can tell what is happening to them. No one of us is strong enough to win alone; together we can be strong enough to win.

~ Alex Shoumatoff, *The World is Burning*, 220

Two Central Commandments of the Oppressed:

One. Do not conform with the situation.

Two. Do not conform with purely individual promotion and success.

Or, in positive terms: struggle, and struggle together.

Clodovis Boff

~ Alex Shoumatoff, *The World is Burning*, 73

Xapuri, 1988: Chronicle of a Death Foretold

On the night of May 24, Chico receives an anonymous call telling him that he will not live out the year. He is now *anunciado*. The *anuncio* is a peculiar form of Brazilian torture in which a killer derives a certain pleasure in telling the victim that he or she will die, and then watching the psychological pain as the victim wonders when and where.

Chico has already survived five assassination attempts. The first was just after the head of the tappers' union, Wilson Pinheiro, was gunned down not he porch of the union hall. Knowing he is next, Chico hides for ninety days, sleeping in a different place every night.

With this latest phone call, everyone knows who is out to kill him. Darli Alves is the owner of land that he planned to clear. An *empate* organized by Chico just a month before stopped the clearing and made the land an extractive reserve. From then on Darli has gone around publicly telling people he is going to kill Chico.

Chico's friends fo to the police. The police do nothing. All efforts to arrest Darli or protect Chico are blocked by the authorities.

We all knew it would happen around Christmastime, says one of his friends later. His friends and co-workers try to convince him to go to São Paulo for the holidays. Chico wants to stay with his family in Xapuri for Christmas. Like all great leaders he resists giving in to fear. Give in to it once and soon it dominates and defines your life. Alter your plans this week and soon the whole direction of your life is changed forever--led more by fear than hope and justice. The great ones keeps their eyes on the prize. But he is no martyr: *Public gestures and a well-attended funeral will not save Amazonia. I want to live.*

On December 18, Chico tells his brother, The situation is ugly. The circle is closing. On December 22, Chico returns from an organizing trip. Late in the afternoon he visits a mother whose son was almost killed by a bus. He sits with her at the kitchen table consoling her. He returns home and by 6:00 p.m. it is dark. He throws a tower over his shoulder to go out in back

to the outhouse. He opens the back door; it's so dark he sees nothing. As he steps out the door an explosion rocks the house. Chico staggers back into the kitchen, his chest and right shoulder filled with buckshot. Careening from the table to the wall to his bedroom, he finally collapses face up on the floor. His wife Ilza runs in. He clings to life a few more seconds, his eyes peaceful. *Damn, they got me.* And then he is gone. His blood, his red fingertips cover the table, the plates, the wall.

His life, and now his death, spread like an *empate* throughout the world, creating an international stand-off that slows and at times stops the destruction of the forest he loved so much.

~ Alex Shoumatoff, *The World is Burning*, 109-113

And More Capitalism

As the Brazilian "miracle" began to lose ground in the early 1970s, the generals looked to large-scale capitalist development projects in the Amazon as their salvation. These massive projects created the greatest or potentially greatest ecological damage. Several huge dams flooded millions of acres of forest.

Mining polluted the waters, and deforestation destroyed the ecological balance of the forest, creating fires that added carbon to the atmosphere and increasing the greenhouse effect.

These projects emphasized the maximum extraction of profit from the forest without any concern for the people or the ecological damage. For example, one of the proposed projects was to create the world's largest rice plantation; another involved the massive tree of wood pulp on a massive scale. A charcoal project would have required 1,680,000 acres of eucalyptus plantations. Public colonization for the small farmer gave way to corporate colonization for the rich.

Amazon, 1990: Chico's Legacy

The government of Brazil founds four large extractive reserves. Taken together they are the size of the state of Massachusetts. One of them is called the Chico Mendes Reserve.

The Continuing Drama

The forest people are struggling today to stop many of these projects. In 1980, the military dictatorship of Ernesto Geisel was under attack. The "miracle" was not happening. The standard of living of the average person had fallen, while inflation was rampant and the value of the Brazilian currency had declined rapidly. Brazil's debt soared, and the "miracle" still needed billions in foreign capital to fuel its huge projects. The dictatorship was followed by a return to democracy, but the struggle for the Amazon rainforest is still being waged.

~ See Susana Hecht and Alexander Cockburn, *The Fate of the Forest: Developers, Destroyers and Defenders of the Amazon*.

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