

Intensive Study of a Culture: The Maya

MW 3:30-5:00

Instructor: Michelle Day, Department of Anthropology

Contact Information: E-mail Address: mmday@midway.uchicago.edu,

Web Page: home.uchicago.edu/~mmday

Office Hours: Fridays 3-5 p.m.

Course Description: This course will serve as an introduction to the study of Mayan culture, history, and identity. The course begins by examining the manner and the methods by which the different fields of anthropology (archaeology, linguistics, sociocultural and physical) have sought to define “the Maya” and the manner in which these definitions overlap and diverge from one another. We will explore the differences postulated by archaeologists between Classic Maya “civilization” and contemporary Maya “culture” and interrogate notions of Maya collapse and survival. Several colonial rebellions by Mayan-speakers will be examined in relation to anthropological discussions of Maya resistance and syncretism in contemporary Mayan-speaking communities. We will explore the role that early explorer-anthropologists had in constructing the Maya as an object of study, with a particular focus on the manner in which these writers portrayed the relationship between contemporary Mayan-speakers and the Classic Maya builders. Two ethnographies by Robert Redfield which served as the standard by which many subsequent ethnographic studies of the Maya were judged will be examined, with a particular focus on Redfield’s discussion of “gradients of civilization” and his notion of progress. We will then discuss early ethnography in its own historical context, exploring the “long conversation” and “cultural misunderstandings” between ethnographers and Maya and the political field in which these actors engaged. We will also read several recent ethnographies of the Maya, including Hervik’s study of the variations in and resistance against being categorized as “Maya” in the Yucatecan community of Oxkutzcab, and Castañeda’s study of the relationship between cultural tourism, anthropology, and Maya agency in continually reinventing the Maya through archaeological monuments. The course will conclude with a discussion of Pan-Mayan activism, exploring the nearly simultaneous yet differential approaches by Mayan intellectuals in Guatemala and members of the Zapatista army in Chiapas, Mexico.

Course Requirements: Students are expected to write one-page weekly response papers to the readings (25%) and to participate in class discussion (10%). A take-home midterm exam will

consist of three essay questions, of which the student is to choose two to write on (25%). A final research paper (10-15 pages) critically reviewing an issue of interest to the student will be due during the last week of the quarter (40%).

Textbooks: All readings will be on reserve at Harper library. The following books will be available at the Seminary Co-op bookstore and through amazon.com for students who wish to purchase books:

- 1) Castañeda, Quetzil. 1996. In the Museum of Maya Culture: Touring Chichén Itzá. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.
- 2) Coe, Michael. 1999. The Maya. Sixth Edition. New York: Thames & Hudson.
- 3) Farriss, Nancy. 1984. Maya Society under Colonial Rule: The Corporate Enterprise of Survival. Princeton University Press.
- 4) Landa, Diego de. 1978. Yucatan Before and After the Conquest. Dover Publications.
- 5) Pratt, Mary L. 1992. Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation. London: Routledge.
- 6) Warren, Kay. 1998. Indigenous Movements and Their Critics: Pan-Maya Activism in Guatemala. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- 7) Womack, John. 1999. Rebellion in Chiapas: An Historical Reader. New York: New Press.



Weekly Reading Assignments

Week One: Anthropology of the Maya

An introduction to archaeological, sociocultural, linguistic, and physical anthropological definitions of the Maya. What kinds of methods do these different fields of anthropology employ, and in what manner do their definitions of the Maya converge and diverge?

September 25: Introduction

September 27: Four Fields of Definition

Coe, Michael. 1999. The Maya, "Introduction," pp. 11-37.

Redfield, Robert and Sol Tax. 1952. "General Characteristics of Present Day Mesoamerican Indian Society." In Heritage of Conquest, pp. 31-39. New York: The Free Press.

Steggarda, Morriss. 1932. Anthropometry of Adult Maya Indians, pp. 1-10. Department of Genetics: Carnegie Institution of Washington.

Campbell, Lyle and Terrence Kaufman. 1985. "Mayan Linguistics: Where Are We Now?" Annual Review of Anthropology 14:187-98.

Week Two: From the "Classic" to the "Colonial"

Pay particular attention to the manner in which Coe defines and uses the concept of "civilization" in this book. For Coe, what is the relationship between contemporary "village cultures" and "Classic Maya civilization"? What does Coe mean by the phrase "the enduring Maya" and how does this relate to his discussion of "the collapse of Maya civilization"? Relate Coe's discussion of "breaking the Maya code" to Landa's description of the Maya and his own colonial activities.

October 2: The Classic Maya – Civilization and Collapse

Coe, Michael. 1999. The Maya, Chapters 3, 5, 6, 7 & 10.

October 4: The Post-Classic and Early Colonial Period

Landa, Diego de. 1978. Yucatan Before and After the Conquest, pages 1-113.

Week Three: Colonial Processes - Fragmentation and Survival

Farriss describes Yucatan as "a colonial backwater" with an unique experience of colonialism. What does Farriss mean by characterizing Maya survival as a "corporate enterprise"? How does this relate to her discussion of religious syncretism in contemporary Mayan-speaking communities?

October 9: The Early Colonial Period.

Farriss, Nancy. 1984. Maya Society under Colonial Rule, Introduction and Prologue, Chapters 1-3.

October 11: Survival and Syncretism.

Farriss, Nancy. 1984. Maya Society under Colonial Rule, Chapters 9 – 11.

Week Four: Rebellion, Economy, and Expeditions

In what manner does the colonial experience in Chiapas outlined by Wasserstrom differ from that described by Farriss for Yucatan? What is the relationship between imperialism, science, and travel during the colonial period and later “scientific” expeditions? In what way do the expedition reports of explorer-anthropologists (like Stephens, Starr, and Blom and La Farge) classify and describe the Maya? How do their classifications differ from those employed during the early colonial period?

October 16: Conquest, Colonialism, and Las Casas in Chiapas

Wasserstrom, Robert. 1983. “The Conquest and Colonization of Chiapas, 1528-1590.” In Class and Society in Central Chiapas, pp. 11-31.

“Las Casas and the Encomenderos of San Cristóbal: Chiapas, 1545.” In the Womack Reader, pp. 63-70.

“Rebellion in the Highlands: The Revolt of 1712.” In the Womack Reader, pp. 77-86.

Ladino Massacre of Highland Indians: The Caste War of 1869.” In the Womack Reader, pp. 87-96.

October 18: Expeditions and Anthropology

Pratt, Mary L. 1992. “Science, Planetary Consciousness, Interiors” (pp. 16-37), and “Alexander von Humboldt and the Reinvention of América” (pp. 112-143) in Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation.

Read at least two of the following selections:

Gage, Thomas. (1626). “Presumptuous and Arrogant Gentlemen, Poisonous Gentlewomen: San Cristóbal, 1626,” In the Womack Reader, pp. 71-76.

Stephens, John (with F. Catherwood). (1841). Incidents of Travel in Yucatan, Volume I, pp. 1-9; Volume II, pp. 179-96.

Starr, Frederick. 1902. The Physical Characters of the Indians of Southern Mexico, pp. 3-7, 50-51.

Blom, Frans and Oliver La Farge. 1926. Tribes and Temples: A Record of the Expedition to Middle America, pp. 3-18. New Orleans: Tulane University.

Week Five: From Expeditions to Ethnography

Redfield outlines a classificatory scheme involving “gradients of civilization.” What constitutes Redfield’s conception of “progress”? How does Redfield’s ethnography differ from the works of earlier anthropologists?

October 23: Chan Kom Visited

Redfield, Robert and Alfonso Villa Rojas. 1934. Chan Kom: A Maya Village, Preface, pp. 1-17, 212-230, browse other sections. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

October 25: Chan Kom Revisited

Redfield, Robert. 1950. A Village that Chose Progress: Chan Kom Revisited, pp. 1-45, 88-138, 155-178. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

*** Midterm Exam Handed Out * - Due Monday of Week Six**

Week Six: Ethnography in Historical Perspective

Sullivan makes the relationship – the “long conversation” – between ethnographers and Mayas his object of study. How does Sullivan’s account of ethnographic practice in the region contrast with the ethnographies and reports we have read earlier? What kind of “cultural misunderstandings” (both accidental and deliberate) does Sullivan describe?

October 30: Speaking with the Enemy

Sullivan, Paul. 1991. Unfinished Conversations, Introduction and Chapter 1.

November 1: Reconnaissance, Conversations, and (Illusions of) Alliances

Sullivan, Paul. 1991. Unfinished Conversations, Chapters 2 – 5.

Week Seven: (Re)Defining Maya Culture

Hervik struggles with contemporary anthropological definitions of the Maya, noting that most actors described by anthropologists as “Maya” themselves reject this categorization. In what manner is “Maya” a foreign category to Mayan-speakers in Oxkutzcab, and what are the categories of self-description that they themselves employ? In what way do “cultural brokers” operating in Oxkutzcab enter into and help produce popular imaginings of the Maya (such as those found in magazines like National Geographic) and how do these efforts conflict with other local ideologies? How does Hervik himself (as a self-described anthropologist) define Mayaness?

November 6: Social Categories in Yucatán

Hervik, Peter. 1999. Mayan People Within and Beyond Boundaries: Social categories and lived identity in Yucatán, Preface and Chapters 1 – 2.

November 8: External Constructions of “the Maya”

Hervik, Peter. 1999. Mayan People Within and Beyond Boundaries, Chapters 3-6.

Optional:

Garrett, Wilburt. 1989. “La Ruta Maya.” National Geographic Magazine 176(4): 424-79.

Lutz, C. and J. Collins. 1986. Reading National Geographic, Chapters 1-2.

Week Eight: Tourism and Anthropology among the Maya

Castañeda concerns himself with the manner in which the Maya have been and are continually (re)invented through the convergence of anthropology, tourism, and local (Maya) society. What does Castañeda mean when he says there is no such thing as “tourist impact”? In what way does Castañeda both employ and critique anthropological constructions of Maya culture, and how does the community of Pisté fit into his argument (as zero-sum culture)? How do local Maya actors (re)appropriate notions of Maya culture produced through archaeological sites such as Chichén Itzá, and what is at stake when foreign actors also proclaim themselves to be Maya?

November 13: Redfield, Culture, and Impact

Castañeda, Quetzil. 1996. In the Museum of Maya Culture, Chapters 1 – 3.

November 15: The Mysterious Maya and the New Age Invasion

Film: Incidents of Travel at Chichén Itzá

Castañeda, Quetzil. 1996. In the Museum of Maya Culture, Chapters 4 – 6.

Week Nine: Pan-Maya Activism

Warren places arguments about Maya identity within the context of a protracted civil war, multiple definitions of recent historical events, and contemporary debates on cultural pluralism in Guatemala. What does Warren say are the “Four Fallacies of ‘Indianness’” and what does it mean to argue that someone is *not* indigenous in this context? How do Pan-Mayan intellectuals critique, appropriate, and redefine anthropological conceptions of Mayan culture?

November 20: Pan-Mayanism and Its Critics on Left and Right

Warren, Kay. 1998. Indigenous Movements and Their Critics, Introduction, Chapters 1-3.

November 22: Tracing the “Invisible Thread of Ethnicity”

Warren, Kay. 1998. Indigenous Movements and Their Critics, Chapters 4-6, 9 and 10.

Week Ten: The Zapatistas

Womack describes the historical conditions and the contemporary context surrounding the emergence of the E.Z.L.N. (the “Zapatistas”) in Chiapas, Mexico. As demonstrated in the following articles, the Zapatistas have put forth multiple, and at times competing, demands and definitions of indigeneity, cultural autonomy, and civil society. In what manner do documents produced by the EZLN early in 1994 differ from those written later? Who is their audience? What does it mean to say that the EZLN is a “Maya” or “indigenous” movement?

November 27: Historical Review

Womack, John. 1999. “Chiapas, the Bishop of San Cristóbal, and the Zapatista Revolt,” pp. 3-59.

“Enough! The Zapatista Declaration of War, January 1994,” Womack Reader, pp. 245-249.

“Revolutionary Legislation: The EZLN’s New Laws, January 1994,” Womack Reader, pp. 250-256.

“Thanks to the Zapatistas: Chamula and Its Exiles, January-February 1994,” Womack Reader, pp. 257-266,

November 29: Civil Society/Indigenous Autonomy/Civil War

“The Zapatistas are Indians, the Government is Responsive,” Womack Reader, pp. 267-277.

“The Sovereignty of Civil Society: The Second Declaration, June 10, 1994,” Womack Reader, pp. 278-286.

“The First Accords: Indian Right and Culture, San Andrés, February 1996,” Womack Reader, pp. 304-315.

“The Civil War in the Highlands: Acteal, December 22, 1997,” Womack Reader, pp. 340-354.

Week Eleven: Term Papers Due on Friday, December 8 by 5 p.m.