

The Plight of the Lacandon Maya

In November 1938, five Lacandonese were put on exhibition at the Guatemalan National Fair. When I say exhibition, I mean that they were taken from the rain forest, put into guarded prison-like surroundings that were meant to mimic their jungle homes, and exhibited like circus animals by the reigning Guatemalan dictator at that time.

Today, the Lacandonese are in a similar situation, under conditions meant to keep them from leaving the rain forest that once served as the sole source of their lives and well-being. Housed in camps under the auspices of the government in Chiapas, Mexico, they are given their basic necessities under the condition that they not leave the area and continue to satiate a growing and curious tourist industry in Palenque. These gentle people, under educated in the ways of the world and governing interests, are caught between their old ways and the aggressive needs of growing corporate interests that have all but destroyed their former ways of life.

For the last century, loggers, traders, oil prospectors, medical scientists, and missionaries have attempted to encroach on the rain forest of the Lacandonese. While this encroachment does not differ from what other indigenous in Chiapas have experienced, what sets the Lacandonese apart is that they were the sole surviving Maya tribe that did not succumb to the influence of the Spanish, which turned Mexico into what it is today. And the Lacandonese are still resisting the influence of outside proselytizing but it is getting more difficult as their resources continue to be taken from them, and they are given limited choices for surviving the future.

The Lacandonese dialect, as well as their religious traditions, are very similar to Hebraic practices, minus the politics. The Catholics, under the Spanish, were unable to convert them, but since the mid 1990s many Christian sects set up missionaries and tried to do so, some successfully. The Lacandonese customs get very little respect from the community and government at-large, outside of the money they bring to Palenque from curiosity seekers.

The last great lord of the Lacandonese and the official carrier of their traditions, Chan K'in, passed away in 1997 at the age of 100. Since that time, the task of carrying these traditions has fallen to his 27 year old grandson Ka'yum. Unfortunately, Ka'yum is not holding up well under the stress of outside instigators. These instigators are not limited to corporate and religious interests however.

U.S. operatives, as well as other South and Central American operatives, are using the area of Palenque for drug trafficking. The current Palenque mayor is in cahoots with a Guatemalan drug trafficker, thus, keeping the city residents strung out and addicted to drugs. For young Mayas trying to find a way to cope with two worlds, the drugs work not only as a sedative but keep them from organizing themselves to make any changes or rebel.

The Chiapas revolutions, between the military and the highland Maya over the last 20 years, are testament to the struggles of the indigenous tribes, fighting to hold onto their homes and resources in this area of the rain forest.

None of this seems news to us in the U.S., as we have seen every last remaining American resource stolen by U.S. corporate interests. We have watched the drugging of native reservations and American cities in an attempt to squelch potential riots and revolution among the indigenous and black populations either by dumbing them, or turning them into hardened criminals and drug traffickers.

What is so tragic about the Lacandones is that besides the outside influences, from within there is no one motivated to keep the old ways. Thus, Maya Mystery Schools around the world are convening with the Lacandones to learn their traditions and teach their ways to those ready to start communities of our own that revere Mother Earth and her resources. We have a long way to go. The opposition is working hard to destroy any respectable employment of the land, its resources, and most of all, its people.

For additional information on the remaining Lacondon Maya tribe, see *The Last Lords of Palenque*, by Victor Perera and Robert Bruce.