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Category: BiographiesPaper Title: rigoberta menchuText: An Indian Woman In Guatemala: Without A Trace Of Bitterness In Her VoiceStacye RothbardTranscultural perspectivesNovember 11, 1996Guatemala is the land of Eternal Springs and the home of the richly culturedandhistoric Mayan people. It it also the country of Rigoberta Menchu, anilleterite farm worker, turned voice of oppressed people everywhere. Guatemalaalso has the sad distinction of being home to Latin America’s oldest civilwar.” For more than three decades, left-wing guerrillas have fought a seriesofrightist governments in Guatemala. The war has killed an estimated 140, 000 inthe country, which has 11 million people.” (N.

Y. Times June 14, 1996 pA4col 2)This is a story of a people in crisis, and one woman’s struggle to use truth, asa means of setting her people free. The majority of the population are Indians, and much of the struggles ariseoutof the ashes of the past. Spain conquered Guatemala in 1524, which was thestart of the oppression of the native people of Guatemala. Since this timethenative people have been ruled by the Spanish speaking minority, the Ladinos, many of which are descended from the Spanish colonists.

Beginning in 1954, when Guatemala’s elected government was overthrown by thearmy, the military began a brutal war against the Indian people. This type oftorture and oppression continued, and during the 1970’s the repression wasespecially harsh; during this time more and more Indians began to resist. Itwas during this time that Rigoberta Menchu’s family became involved in theresistance. The situation in Guatemala is similar to South Africa, where the blackmajorityare ruled with absolute power by the white minority. Like South Africa, theIndians in Guatemala are lacking in even the most basic of human rights.

“ Indeed the so-called forest Indians are being systematicallyexterminated inthe name of progress. But unlike the Indian rebels of the past, who wanted togo back to pre-Columbian times, Rigoberta Menchu is not fighting in the nameofan idealized or mythical past.” (Menchu xiii) Rigoberta is workingtowarddrawing attention to the plight of native people around the globe. Once an illiterate farm worker, she has taught herself to read and writeSpanish, the language of her oppressor, as a means of relating her story to the world. She tells the story of her life with honesty and integrity in hopes ofimpressing upon the world the indignation of the oppressed.

In addition totheSpanish language, Rigoberta borrows such things as the bible and trade unionorganization in order to use them against their original owners. There isnothing like the bible in her culture. She says, “ The Bible is written, andthat gives us one more weapon.” ( Menchu xviii ) Her people need to basetheiractions on the laws that come down from the past, on prophecy. Her own history and the history of her family is told with great detail inthebook I, Rigoberta Menchu. Not only does one learn about the culture of herpeople and about the community in which she lives, but an understanding isgained as to impetus to react against ones oppressor. Born the sixth child toan already impoverished but well respected family, Rigoberta remembersgrowingup in the mountains on land that no one else wanted, spending months at atimegoing with her family to work on the fincas (plantations).

A lorry owned by the finca would come to their village, and the workers, alongwith their children and animals, would ride together, in filthy andovercrowdedconditions. Each lorry would hold approximately forty people, and the trip tothe finca took two nights and one day, with no stops allowed for thebathroom, it is easy to imagine the unsanitary condition that resulted. Each workerwouldtake with them a cup and a plate and a bottle for water when they worked inthefields. The youngest of the children that were not yet able to work had noneedfor their own cup and plate since, if they did not work, they would not befedby the finca. These children’s mothers would share with them their own rationof tortilla and beans, though many of the children were severelymalnourished, and two of Rigoberta’s own brothers died while on the finca. At the tender age of eight Rigoberta was earning money to help her family, andas proof of her own personal fortitude, by age ten she was picking the quotasofan adult and was paid as such.

Her first experience in the city was at twelveyears old in the capital of Guatemala where she worked as a maid. She