

Chiapas History

Background

In the past 12 years, Chiapas has become known worldwide as a place of rebellion and incredible natural beauty after it was thrust into the international spotlight in early 1994. But the long-neglected and oppressed Mexican state has a rich and complicated history that began long before the Zapatista movement was born. Knowledge of this history is vitally important to gaining a complete and responsible understanding of Chiapan culture, ethnic diversity and the current political situation.

Learning Objectives

This workshop provides recipients with a general overview of Chiapas history from pre-colonial times to the present.

Preparation

Participants are asked to read a chapter titled, “Colonialism, State Formation and Resistance” by Neil Harvey as well as a Zapatista comunicado issued at the time of the caracoles' formation.

Materials

- “Colonialism, State Formation and Resistance,” from *The Chiapas Rebellion: The Struggle for Land and Democracy* by Neil Harvey
- “El Tercero Comunicado de la Selva Lacandona” by Subcomandante Marcos

Directions

Participants should come prepared to discuss the readings listed above in relation to the current situation in Chiapas. The facilitator should begin the session with the Harvey reading focusing on the following themes:

- Colonialism
- Power relations
- Indigenous vs. Mestizo dynamics
- Role of the Church
- Methods of resistance
- Significance of Mexican revolution in Chiapas
- State authority vs. community autonomy

The facilitator should allow approximately 60-90 minutes for the Harvey reading. Then the group should proceed to the Marcos communiqué and discuss what (if any)

relationship exists between the strategy and ideals of the EZLN and the history of social/political dynamics in Chiapas. The workshop concludes with the facilitator leading a reflection on how the history of the region has affected the current political climate in Chiapas.

Facilitator Notes

The facilitator's role is especially important in this workshop as the majority of time is allocated to a group discussion of the Harvey reading. Throughout the discussion, the facilitator should focus participants on how the region's history has contributed to its current social and political climate.

Texts

Rebellion in Chiapas- John Womack

A Rich Land, a Poor People: Politics and Society in Modern Chiapas- Thomas Benjamin

Basta! Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas- George Collier

Rebellion from the Roots– John Ross

Histories and Stories from Chiapas: Border Identities in Southern Mexico- Hernandez Castillo

Visuals

Map: State map of Chiapas with most medium-large cities identified.
<http://www.chiapaspictures.com/displayimage.php?album=48&pos=3>

Map: Municipalities of Chiapas
<http://www.ciepac.org/images/maps/chiapas.gif>

Map: Regions inhabited by the eight primary indigenous groups in Chiapas
<http://www.ciepac.org/images/maps/etnias.gif>

Photo: Panoramic view of San Cristobal
<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/d/d1/SanChrisChisPanorama.jpg>

Map: State map indicating levels of marginalization according to municipality
<http://www.ciepac.org/images/maps/margedo.gif>

Other Useful Links

Official Website of the EZLN
www.ezln.org

IndyMedia Chiapas

(an excellent news source for both Zapatista and non-Zapatista news in and around Chiapas)

<http://chiapas.mediosindependientes.org/>

Wikipedia-Chiapas

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiapas>

Chiapas State Government Webpage

<http://www.turismochiapas.gob.mx/>