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Kayapo Indian leader Bep Koroti Payakan Kayapo protests against the building of the Altamira dam on Kayapo territory in Amazonia, Brazil.

Chronology

- 30,000BC First people reach the Americas across the Bering Straits from Asia
- 1492 Columbus arrives in the Americas, to be met by friendly Arawak Indians
- 1519 Cortés invades Mexico with 600 men
- 1535 Pizarro completes conquest of Inca empire
- mid 16th century Arawak population of the Caribbean extinct within 50 years of Columbus' arrival
- 1781 Túpac Amaru lays siege to Cuzco, the former Inca capital, in Indian rebellion. Amaru captured and executed
- 1960s Officials of Brazil's government agency for Indians use poison, machine guns and disease to 'clear' land for large landowners
- early 1980s 400 Indian villages destroyed, 40,000 killed in counter-insurgency operations in Guatemala,
- 1989 Brazil's Kayapo Indians hold meeting at Altamira to protest dam-building on tribal lands.
- 1992 Indigenous groups throughout the Americas condemn the official celebrations of the quincentenary of Columbus' arrival in the Americas

Race Against Time

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Indigenous Peoples

Cabo Domingo (Cape Sunday) is a lonely place. Low, dark hills under an enormous sky sink towards the ocean at the southern tip of the Americas. At this spot one Sunday in the 1920s a German landowner held a banquet for the local Yaganes Indians. When they were drunk, his hidden henchmen opened fire with a machine gun. The Yaganes died because, unaccustomed to the concept of private property, they had killed and eaten the landowner's sheep. The Indians of Tierra del Fuego were an almost stone-age people dressed in skins and using flint hand-tools. When the whites started to colonise the region in the 1880s, the various tribes soon succumbed to disease and slaughter. Today only a few impoverished old folk remain of the people whose permanent camp fires gave Tierra del Fuego (Land of Fire) its name.

Several thousand miles north, at the Altamira gathering in February 1989, the Kayapo Indians of Brazil were fighting to avoid the same fate as the Yaganes. In organising a campaign to prevent a massive hydroelectric dam flooding their lands, they made full use of modern technology and their own appeal to foreign liberals. Dressed in little more than exotic feather headresses, warlike Kayapo men danced, debated and expertly wielded video cameras to record the proceedings for the people back home. The dramatic highlight came during a pompous speech by an uncomfortable-looking engineer from Electronorte, the Brazilian electricity company. As he tried to impress a hall full of angry Kayapo warriors with technical jargon, an old Indian woman jumped up and ceremonially slapped him about the face with the flat blade of her machete. Cameras flashed as the engineer sat stoically through it all. The Indians had turned the tables. Now they were treating *him* like a child. Five hundred assorted ecologists, journalists and aid agency representatives jostled for a view of the event, which galvanised international opposition to the dam scheme.

The Kayapo's dynamism belies the conventional western image of fatalistic Indians calmly awaiting extinction. Latin America's history is full of the uprisings and resistance of peoples whose civilisations were in many ways far in advance of Europe's at the time of the Conquest.

The Americas' original inhabitants came from Asia, crossing the Bering Straits about 50,000 years ago and migrating slowly south until every part of the continent was populated, albeit thinly, with Indian groups. The original migrants were hunter-gatherers, and groups like the Yaganes and Kayapo changed little over the millenia. Elsewhere, however, Indian groups developed agriculture about 5,000 years ago. Once settled on the land, they swiftly built the highly complex and

cultured civilisations which dazzled the first European visitors.

The Mayas were a nation of astronomers and architects, already in decline before the Spaniards came. They were brilliant mathematicians, developing the concept of zero long before any other civilisation, and making astronomical calculations of astonishing accuracy. Their ornate temples are still being rescued from the jungles of Central America, and it is not yet clear what caused the Mayan empire to go into a sudden decline around 1000 AD.

The Incas covered the largest area of any of the pre-Columbian empires, spanning present-day Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia and parts of Colombia, Chile, Argentina and Brazil. Their extraordinary level of social organisation can still be seen in the mammoth stone buildings of Cuzco and Machu Picchu and the remains of agricultural terracing that line many Andean valleys, often still being farmed by the Incas' descendants.

The Aztecs, at their height when Cortés and his band of conquistadores arrived in Mexico, lived on a permanent war footing. In their capital city of Tenochtitlan, site of today's Mexico City, they sacrificed up to 20,000 prisoners of war in a single day to the gods of war, rain and harvest. Their empire was built on a constant thirst for booty and fresh sacrifices, and the Spanish proved skillful in using the subject tribes' hatred of the Aztecs in their overthrow.

Despite their vast numerical superiority (Cortés invaded Mexico with just 600 men), the mighty Indian empires crumbled before the Spanish. In part, the conquistadores' success came from their superior technology of warfare: they used armour, horses, cannon and muskets against Indian soldiers armed with spears and arrows. The Spanish also proved adept at playing off rival Indian peoples against each other and at capitalising on the Inca and Aztec empires' extreme dependence on a single emperor. Both Cortés in Mexico and Pizarro in Peru first took the emperor prisoner then murdered them, leaving the empires leaderless before the Spanish onslaught.

Once the centre had been removed, the Spanish viceroy replaced the emperor as the supreme authority and the former empires fell into

TABLE 9: ESTIMATED INDIGENOUS POPULATION OF AMERICA AT THE TIME OF EUROPEAN CONTACT

	Estimated population (million)	% of total
North America	4.4	7.7
Mexico	21.4	37.3
Central America	5.65	9.9
Caribbean	5.85	10.2
Andes	11.5	20.1
Lowland South America	8.5	14.8
Total	57.3	100.0

Source: William M Denevan (ed), *The Native Population of the Americas in 1492*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1976.



Foto: Frev/UMI

their hands. Where Indian groups were less advanced and centralised, the Spanish encountered much greater difficulties. In southern Chile and Argentina the native Mapuche peoples successfully resisted the colonial forces, finally losing their fight to the new Chilean and Argentine armies following Latin America's independence from Spain. As always, the victors write the history, and Argentine schoolchildren now learn the names of the heroes of the 'War of the South', a 19th-century campaign to exterminate the Indians, during which soldiers were paid a reward for each pair of Indian testicles they brought in to their commanders. The extermination of the Indians opened up the south of Argentina for sheep and cattle ranching.

A further legacy of the Conquest was the misnomer, 'Indian', dating from Columbus' first landfall, in the Americas, when thanks to a miscalculation of the circumference of the globe, he was convinced he had reached Asia. In the furore surrounding the Columbus quincentenary in 1992, many indigenous Latin Americans not only reject the term 'Indian', which in Spanish carries distinctly derogatory overtones, but even object to the words 'Latin American'. The region's native peoples point out that they are not in any sense Latin, and object to being called American, since the term stems from the name of another European explorer, Amerigo Vespucci.

Military victory marked the beginning of a process of extermination. Within a century of the Conquest, Latin America's Indian population fell from 100 million to ten million, by one estimate. In the Caribbean, the Arawak peoples who first greeted Columbus with delight soon rued the day they had paddled their canoes out to his ships, bearing gifts for the exhausted sailors. Enslaved to the Spanish lust for gold, those Indians who survived smallpox, influenza, measles and the other new diseases committed mass suicide by poisoning and hanging.

Women at Sololá market, Guatemala. Guatemala and Bolivia are the only countries in Latin America with majority Indian populations.

Mothers even slaughtered their newborn babies to prevent them being enslaved by the Spanish. Within 25 years of Columbus' arrival, only 3,000 Arawaks remained of an original population of 600,000, and by the mid-16th century they were extinct. Five centuries later, the youth of Brazil's Katowa Indians met the same threat in the same way. In 1990 alone, 20 boys and girls from the threatened tribe, all aged between 13 and 18, killed themselves by hanging or poisoning. Thirty others tried but were saved. On February 3, 1991, 15-year old Maura Ramírez hung herself from a tree. Her mother said, 'she was sad. She dreamt Helena was calling her.' Helena, Maura's elder sister, had committed suicide three months earlier. Psychologists blamed the deaths on the dislocation caused by going away to work on the sugar plantations.

Although more Indians fell victim to the diseases introduced by the Spanish and Portuguese than died in the mines, plantations or battlefields, the level of economic exploitation and misery inflicted by the Europeans was at least partially responsible for making the Indians so vulnerable to illness. Millions were literally worked to death.

The colonial authorities adopted various systems for exacting tribute and labour from their Indian 'vassals'. During the initial period the *encomienda* system rewarded Spanish officers and favourites with whole Indian communities. In return for supposedly bringing their allocated Indians to Christianity, the *encomenderos* were authorised to demand tribute and unpaid labour. In the densely populated regions of Mexico and the Andes, this left Indian villages more or less intact. In more sparsely peopled regions, the *encomienda* system degenerated into raiding parties to abduct slaves.

In the Andes an adapted version of this scheme, known as the *mita*, persisted through to independence, while in Mexico and Central America, the authorities preferred a 'free' labour force. European writers and theologians put forward a variety of ideological justifications to show that the natural inferiority of the Indians made their enslavement both necessary and an act of mercy.

As the centuries passed, racial boundaries became blurred. Since men far outnumbered women in the European colonial communities, Indian women were frequently obliged to have sex by their owners and the subsequent intermingling of blood created a growing mixed-race population, known as mestizos. Other Indians abandoned their traditional dress and learned Spanish, often moving to the cities. Over time, cultural criteria, rather than physical characteristics, became the means of identifying ethnic background. An 'Indian' wore non-European dress and spoke little or no Spanish, whereas a 'mestizo' adopted both the white language and western dress. In the coastal regions of Latin America, Indians were swiftly wiped out on the plantations and were replaced with African slaves who added a further ingredient to the continent's racial mix.

The independence wars of the early 19th century were largely a dispute between the local *criollo* ruling class and the Spanish, and little changed for the continent's indigenous peoples. The 19th century brought further encroachments on the Indians' traditional communal lands as liberal administrations in many countries made it illegal to

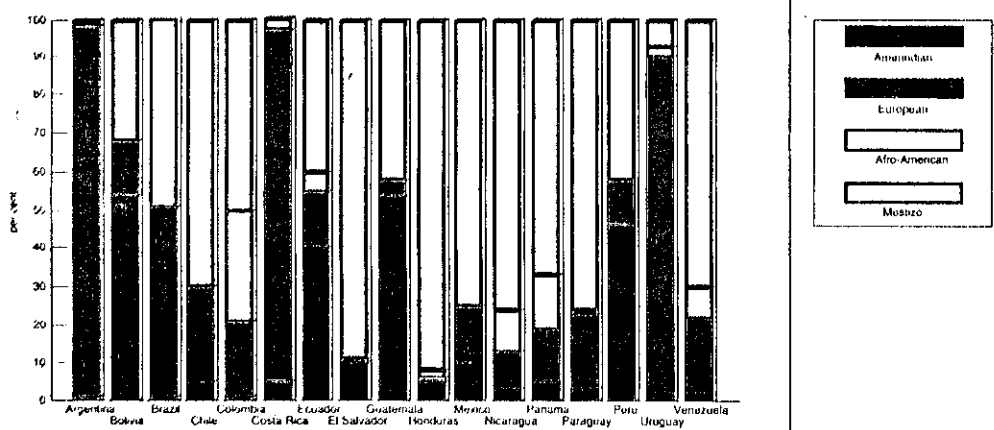
hold land in common and insisted on private ownership. The Indians' traditional collectivism was anathema to governments trying to introduce notions of private property and individual enterprise, although their cohesion as communities made them better able to resist. The new legislation paved the way for large landowners to move in and buy or seize Indian lands for new crops such as coffee.

Modern Indians

The continent's Indian survivors now make up five per cent of its total population and fall into two distinct groups. The first, and by far the largest, is that of the highland Indians, descendants of the Inca, Aztec and Mayan empires. The second are the lowland Indians, like the Kayapo, largely confined to the Amazon basin and Central America. In both Guatemala and Bolivia, over half the population is Indian, while the largest numbers live in Peru and Mexico. Although highland Indians number some 22 million, lowland Indians do not exceed one million, of whom about a quarter live in Brazil, with smaller numbers in the other countries of the Amazon basin: Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. Isolated groups of lowland Indians also survive in the Central American countries of Panama, Nicaragua and Honduras.

When not tied to the *haciendas* of the big landowners, highland Indian communities farm the land in much the same way as they did five centuries ago. They grow the traditional crops — maize, beans and squash in Mexico, potatoes and maize in the Andes, using mainly the simple technology of the digging stick and hoe. Communities stick together, and members are encouraged not to sell land to outsiders and to marry within the village. Although their lifestyles are often romanticised by outsiders, Indian farming communities suffer the high

FIGURE 2: ETHNIC PROFILES IN LATIN AMERICA, 1985



Source: The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Latin America, Cambridge, 1985

INDIAN IDENTITY

'Our parents tell us: "Children, the earth is the mother of man, because she gives him food." This is especially true for us whose life is based on the crops we grow. Our people eat maize, beans and plants. We can't eat ham, or cheese, or things made by machines. So we think of the earth as the mother of man, and our parents teach us to respect the earth. We must only harm the earth when we are in need. This is why, before we sow our maize, we have to ask the earth's permission.

By accepting the Catholic religion, we didn't accept a condition, or abandon our culture. It was more like another way of expressing ourselves. It's like expressing ourselves through a tree, for example; we believe that a tree is a being, a part of nature, and that a tree has its image, its representation, its *nahual*, to channel our feelings to the one God. That is the way we Indians conceive it. Catholic Action is like another element which can merge with the elements which already exist within Indian culture. And it confirms our belief that, yes, there is a God, and, yes, there is a father for all of us. And yet it is something we think of as being only for what happens up there. As far as the earth is concerned, we must go on worshipping through our own intermediaries, just as we have always done, through all the elements found in nature.

When we evoke the colour of the sun, it's like evoking all the elements which go to make up our life. The sun as the channel to the one God, receives the plea from his children that they should never violate the rights of all the other beings which surround them. This is how we renew our prayer which says that men, the children of the one God, must respect the life of the trees, the birds, the animals around us. We must respect the life of every single one of them. We must respect the life, the purity, the sacredness, which is water. We must respect the one God, the heart of the sky, which is the sun. We must not do evil while the sun shines upon his children. This is a promise.'

Burgos Debray (ed) 1984

levels of infant mortality and insecurity common to all peasant farmers.

Where they have managed to retain a level of independence, such communities frequently enjoy a rich cultural life. In Guatemala, each highland village has its own distinctive costume, with unique designs passed on from mother to daughter for generations. Many traditional practices have survived the efforts of the colonial authorities. Faith healers combine herbal medicine and magic, and the religion of the European invaders has been fused with its predecessors into an original form of folk Catholicism. Communities attach great importance to ritual cycles involving saints' days, feast days and ceremonies such as baptism, marriage and funerals.

In the course of this century modern influences have gradually eroded this traditional pattern. Improved roads have increased trading and involvement in the money economy; improved education and contact with the outside world have enabled most Indians to speak Spanish; and growing numbers of protestant missionaries have both converted Indian groups and persuaded them to abandon their



Willy Cacerenas/Cusco/1AFO/Portos

traditional customs. The old ways persist most stubbornly in Guatemala, where many speakers of the country's 21 Indian languages still know no more than a few words of Spanish. In most areas men are assimilated into non-Indian ways faster than women, since men have more contact with the money economy through wage labour, and women less frequently go to school, where Spanish is often the only permitted language.

A healer practising a ritual, Peru.

Another major cause of what is known as 'acculturation', the Indians' loss of their traditional culture, is urbanisation. The exodus to the cities brings contact with poor mestizos and Indians from other communities, and Spanish frequently becomes the common language. The disruption of the move often leaves few vestiges of traditional culture intact.

War and repression also accelerate the process. In Guatemala, a ferocious army counter-insurgency campaign in the Indian highlands since the early 1980s left 40,000 dead and over 400 Indian villages destroyed. Many more Indians fled their villages to seek refuge in the cities, where they sought anonymity by abandoning their traditional dress and customs. Over a million people have been displaced from their homes in what borders on a race war against the Indians. In the mid-1980s one Guatemalan President warned 'we must get rid of the words "indigenous" and "Indian"'. Peru's civil war between the Shining Path guerrillas and the army has also driven many Indian families into the swelling shanty towns around Lima.

Violent racism persists in most countries with a significant Indian population. In Guatemala the enormous divide between poor, non-Spanish speaking Indians and wealthy white landowners and entrepreneurs closely resembles apartheid.

DEBT BONDAGE IN COLOMBIA

'We called all the Indians together, along with their families, in a ravine or at the mouth of a river and there, in the presence of the Indian authorities, we advanced them: one shirt, one machete, some knives to make the cuts [in the rubber trees], a belt so that they didn't fall out of the trees, and of course, any goods they wanted. Throughout the year, we advanced them anything they, or their women, asked for. The women were their ruin and our business, because they fancied everything. Vanity does not respect colour, nor age, nor sex. They wanted combs, perfumes, mirrors and coloured beads, cloth and more cloth, high-heeled shoes and ribbons for their hair. The men asked for drink, Italian sweets and German radios. They liked music and partying.

Every day around 4pm the line of Indians would arrive with the latex, which was weighed on scales and then each Indian's amount was entered in a book. The scales didn't measure the true weight, and the amount we wrote in the book wasn't the amount on the scales. The [German missionary] did a lot of damage because she taught the 'cousins' figures and they began to cause trouble the whole time. When they got unhappy, they'd run away. So we had to invent the pass — no boss would give them an advance if the Indians couldn't show a pass signed by their previous boss to prove that they had paid off their debts. Some Indians managed to pay off their debts, and even earned some money on top, but others didn't. Everything depended on their boss. Some bosses fiddled the books so they never managed to pay it off. But others were very humane and only wrote down what the Indian asked for.'

Alfredo Molano, *Aguas Arriba*, Bogotá, 1990, author's translation

Lowland Indians

'No one sells his own son or his mother, because he loves them. In the same way, it is an absurd idea for an Indian to sell his land. We can't change our feelings for our land, which is where our ancestors are buried.'

Taxáua Indian, Brazil

In contrast to the highland Indians' stable agriculture based on herding and crop rotation, lowland Indians usually practise mobile slash-and-burn forms of farming, combined with fishing and hunting. Both groups, however, share an overwhelming and mystical bond with the land. Lowland Indians, like those of the highlands, have strong religious traditions in which worship of aspects of the natural world is mediated through shamans who speak to the deities in a trance.

Lowland Indians typically live more communally than highlanders, often in communal houses, known as *malocas*, which can hold several hundred people. *Malocas* have been criticised by protestant missionaries for encouraging promiscuity and in many cases have been abandoned in favour of family houses. Many hundreds of different language groups exist, some comprising only a few hundred speakers.



Victor Englebert/Sunnal

Whereas highland Indians have been in contact with whites virtually since the first days of the Conquest, lowland Indians have frequently lived in inaccessible areas, especially those in the Amazon basin, which outsiders have only recently penetrated. There are still believed to be a few groups, numbering perhaps a few thousand, of 'uncontacted' Indians in the area. When contact does occur, it is frequently as disastrous for the Indians as it was in the 16th century, leading to epidemics of disease, and violent confrontations with settlers, such as those that have recently befallen the Yanomami Indians (see chapter 3).

Lowland Indians have suffered the same 'curse of wealth' as their highland relatives. In the rubber boom at the end of the 19th century, unscrupulous rubber companies trapped and enslaved large numbers of Indian tribes as latex collectors. In the Putumayo region of Colombia, 40,000 Indians were killed by these rubber barons between 1886 and 1919. After rubber came oil, African palm, cattle and oil, each new commodity penetrating new areas of the forest and absorbing or driving out the local Indian groups.

The other main source of encroachment on Indian lands has been the colonisation programmes, either spontaneous or government-run, through which landless mestizo peasants have moved into the forest, cutting down the trees to make way for food crops. This has provoked frequent armed conflict between peasants and Indians.

Government attitudes to the lowland Indians have generally alternated between cynical disregard and a desire to 'integrate' the Indians into national life, a process anthropologists condemn as 'ethnocide'. One Brazilian government official proudly described his policy to a visiting journalist:

Yanomami Indians, Amazonia, on the border between Brazil and Venezuela. The Yanomami are Amazonia's largest tribal group, but are declining rapidly as gold prospectors and roads invade their territory, spreading diseases and disrupting communities.

TRADITION AND CONFLICT

'The civilised people invade, kill our children. We have no support. People let cattle loose all over the land of the Indians. The oldest shamans are dying off. The young ones don't have the knowledge that the old ones had. ...The Xerentes have feasts and dances — the feasts of yam, of honey, of the cutting of hair. They have their own language. When they return from hunting, they don't rest immediately, but wait for the old shaman. Then they relax slowly, while the shaman sings and prays to God.

When a son is born, they go on a diet. The father doesn't eat manioc flour. He doesn't kill snakes. He doesn't collect feathers. Only after spreading honey on his face does he eat honey. When someone dies, he weeps.

When the Indian is about to travel, people join with him and sing and cry with him. When he returns, there is another feast of joy — because he went and he returned. When the moon is beautiful everyone sings. They sing with bowed heads. Only the chief looks at the moon.

Every full moon they sing and celebrate. But ever since civilisation came, they have suffered tremendously. Flu, which they never had in the past, has appeared. The shamans are no longer able to carry out cures. Tuberculosis is what most effects the Xerente today....They used to take medicines from the forest, but there is nothing to deal with the sicknesses of the civilised people. They tried medicines from the forest, but they don't help. They asked the priest to get them some medicine for the sicknesses of the civilised people, and now they are a bit better. This year there was no big sickness.'

Indian spokesman, in Branford and Glock 1985

We resettle them as quickly as possible in new villages and then remove the children and begin to educate them. We give them the benefit of our medicine and our education, and, once they are completely integrated citizens like you and me and the Minister here, we let them go out into the world.

Once out in the world, 'integrated' Indians often end up on the social scrapheap; surviving as beggars or prostitutes on the fringes of the frontier boom-towns of the Amazon. Sometimes the ethnocide was more deliberate. In Brazil in the early 1960s, a subsequent government enquiry found that corrupt officials of its own Indian agency had connived with local landowners to massacre entire tribes using dynamite, machine guns and poisoned sugar. Other investigations showed that tribes in the Mato Grosso had been deliberately infected with smallpox, influenza, tuberculosis and measles.

Rebellion and Resistance

The slow genocide of the Indian nations provoked fierce resistance. In some cases, as in the Caribbean or Brazil, Indian groups opted for mass suicide rather than bow to the dictates of the whites. Many others

THE LAST INCA: TUPAC AMARU II

In 1781 Túpac Amaru laid siege to Cuzco. This mestizo chief, a direct descendant of the Inca emperors, headed the broadest of messianic revolutionary movements. The rebellion broke out in Tinta province, which had been almost depopulated by enforced service in the Cerro Rico mines. Mounted on his white horse, Túpac Amaru entered the plaza of Tungasuca and announced to the sound of drums and *pututus* [conch-shell trumpets] that he had condemned the royal Corregidor Antonio Juan de Arriaga to the gallows and put an end to the Potosí *mita*. A few days later Túpac issued a decree liberating the slaves. He abolished all taxes and forced labour in all forms. The Indians rallied by the thousands to the forces of the 'father of all the poor and all the wretched and helpless'. He moved against Cuzco at the head of his guerrilleros, promising that all who died while under his orders in this war would return to life to enjoy the happiness and wealth the invaders had wrested from them. Victories and defeat followed; in the end, betrayed and captured by one of his own chiefs, Túpac was handed over in chains to the royalists. The Examiner Areche entered his cell to demand, in exchange for promises, the names of his rebel accomplices. Túpac Amaru replied scornfully, "There are no accomplices here except you and I. You as oppressor, I as liberator, deserve to die."

Túpac was tortured, along with his wife, his children and his chief aides, in Cuzco's Plaza del Wacaypata. His tongue was cut out; his arms and legs were tied to four horses with the intention of quartering him, but his body would not break; he was finally beheaded at the foot of the gallows. His head was sent to Tinta, one arm to Tungasuca and the other to Carabaya, one leg to Santa Rosa and the other to Livitaca.

Galeano 1973

retreated into the most inaccessible areas of the continent to escape the burden of constant tributes and forced labour. Some took up arms against the Spanish authorities, the most famous being Peru's Túpac Amaru. Yet neither Indian revolts nor independence succeeded in re-establishing Indian self-rule. In the endless cycle of revolt and defeat, the Indians learned the wisdom of the advice given by Quintín Lame, a Colombian Indian revolutionary leader: 'Do not believe in the friendship of the white man or the mestizo; distrust gifts and flattery; never consult a white lawyer; do not allow yourself to be hoodwinked by the chattering politicians of any party.'

Elsewhere, Indian resistance to oppression was more subtle, but no less stubborn.

In those days we dressed in dark colours decorated with flowers, black *awayos*. We always wore dark blue. But we had to put on coloured clothes because the landowner scolded us: 'How long are you going to continue going around in black, when will you change?' The foremen would go from house to house and whip those wearing dark blue skirts and destroy the tubs used for dying. But we carried on wearing our clothes. That landowner is dead now. The foremen would beat us up and say furiously:

Sebastián Turpo/Ayora/TAFOS/Panos



Wedding arch and procession, Peru. Ceremonies and rituals form a central part of the Indian calendar.

'Damn you, don't you have ears?' We would escape to some corners of the river and change our clothes: the dark skirt that we had on underneath we put on top and the other underneath it.

Andean Oral History Workshop, 'Indigenous Women and Community Resistance: History and Memory', Jolin (ed) 1990

According to Guatemalan Indian leader Rigoberta Menchú, this passive refusal to follow orders explains the reputation for passivity which the Indians acquired in the eyes of outsiders:

'This is why Indians are thought to be stupid. They can't think, they don't know anything, they say. But we have hidden our identity because we needed to resist, we wanted to protect what governments have wanted to take away from us. They have tried to take our things away and impose others on us, be it through religion, through dividing up the land, through schools, through books, through radio, through all things modern.

Through this combination of both passive and violent resistance, Latin America's Indian peoples have achieved their most remarkable victory — survival. In the face of five centuries of a military, epidemic, cultural and economic onslaught, the Indians have survived, and are now increasing in numbers. However, most remain outsiders in their own lands, condemned to poverty, racism and persecution. The last 25 years have seen attempts to build a politics based on the indigenous peoples' growing sense of identity and self-confidence, producing an upsurge in Indian resistance. Among highland groups, Indians have organised peasant associations and taken up arms to become involved in civil wars in Guatemala and Peru, while in the lowland areas a plethora of Indian organisations has sprung up, demanding land and

help from the government, and defending themselves against the invasions of agribusiness, mining companies and poor peasant colonisers. Mario Juruna, the first Indian to become a deputy in Brazil's parliament, made his people's demands quite clear:

Indian wealth lies in customs and communal traditions and land which is sacred. Indians can and want to choose their own road, and this road is not civilisation made by whites ... Indian civilisation is more human. We do not want paternalistic protection from whites. Indians today ... want political power.

Indian organisations typically rely on individual communities as their basic building blocks. Federations of communities then grow to cover an area, in some cases combining to form regional and even national confederations. Some cross border cooperation has also begun, for example in producing a joint response to the 500th anniversary of Columbus' first voyage to the Americas. In the words of Indian groups from the seven countries of Central America: 'The value of our people has been hidden and ignored by the West ... they call our medicine witchcraft; our religion, superstition; our history, myths; our art, folklore and our languages, dialect.'

Several problems have dogged these attempts at organisation. The first has been the difficulty of building alliances between different indigenous groups and between highland and lowland Indians. But even more thorny has been the problem of the relationship between Indian and non-Indian organisations. Indian organisations are often understandably suspicious of non-Indian political parties and peasant organisations, fearing that they see the world purely in terms of class divisions, and fail to recognise and respect the Indians' right to be culturally distinct. Conflicts between Indians and poor colonists can further sour the relationship between Indians and peasants. In Bolivia, one Indian woman gave voice to the extreme 'indigenist' position: 'To the Indian, the Spaniard is only a tenant. And we have to hit him, complain about him and tell him to leave, because we are the owners and we are going to return.'

Despite these obstacles, the political strength of Indian organisation has grown steadily in recent years, forcing parties, social movements and governments alike to take their demands seriously. Some of the greatest recent advances have been in Bolivia, where the Katarista movement has given a strong voice and political presence to the highland Indians, and in the Brazilian Amazon, where in the wake of Chico Mendes' murder, Indians, rubber-tappers and peasant groups overcame their traditional antipathies and formed the Forest Peoples' Alliance to press for the establishment of sustainable 'extractive reserves' (see chapter 3) and other demands. Indian groups have also had much of their programme adopted by the Brazilian Workers' Party (PT).

Such initiatives have helped boost the low morale of many lowland Indian groups, and Indian populations in some areas have once again started to rise. Yet, although Indian groups have successfully won worldwide recognition and support from pressure groups such as Survival International, they frequently face extreme forms of

discrimination and contempt at home. When two Kayapo leaders returned to Brazil in 1988, following a trip to the World Bank to lobby against a dam project which would have flooded their lands, they were arrested and tried under a law forbidding foreigners to intervene in Brazil's internal affairs. Similar anti-Indian sentiments would sit equally well with the ruling white and mestizo elites of Guatemala, Bolivia or Peru.

In the long term, Indians and non-Indians are likely to continue to merge in a process of social and economic 'integration' which in reality means the destruction of the Indians' cultures in return for a place at the bottom of mestizo society. However the recent resurgence of Indian organisation offers the possibility — albeit remote — of a future where Indians and non-Indians live in mutual respect and different cultures can flourish side by side.