



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1998 Volume I: The Use and Abuse of History in Film and Video

Heroes and Villains of the Rain Forest: Latin American History through Film

Curriculum Unit 98.01.07
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Latin American history is dramatic and panoramic, making easy access for film makers to capture the contradictions and confrontations of history since the Conquest. Latin American history is the story of the struggle of the common people to acquire and maintain the necessities of life. As defined by the Constitution of the United States these inalienable rights include life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, freedom of speech and religion. International human rights law includes freedom from oppression and access to physical necessities, food, shelter, water. The Latin American struggle has been for the land needed to create these necessities. As I write this curriculum, the people of Chiapas, Mexico, are fighting to regain lands they had held for hundreds of years before cattle ranches annexed them. In Brazil, Chico Mendes died fighting for the rain forests, not for world ecology, but for the rubber tappers whose livelihood was threatened by the destruction of the rain forests. The last tribes of the vast Amazon have at last come into contact with western civilization, and left us a moral dilemma. Should we intervene for the sake of their health and what we consider quality of life, we will surely destroy that culture. Should we leave them alone to live out another generation or two in the tradition of natural life they have lived for thousands of years? It is not an exaggeration that the future of Earth is in the rain forests.

In my school, rain forest ecology and Maya civilization are taught in Social Studies. My sixth, seventh and eighth grade Spanish students bring Familiarity with rain forest habitat and how one civilization adapted to it. I plan to extend this background into an understanding of post Columbian conflicts about the rain forests. This paper comes out of the seminar, "The Use and Abuse of History in Film and Video," in which we reviewed films about history, with an eye to how much more complex history is than the point of view of any one film maker, or for that matter, book writer. For my curriculum I have selected films about Latin America which represent a variety of historical interpretations, and a variety of artistic successes. Each tells part of the story; each represents a point of view, an historical context, a real or imaginary event. By the end of the curriculum students will have acquired an understanding of Latin American rain forests in history and the impact on current policies.

The historical films I will use are: *Cabeza de Vaca*, *Aguirre: the Wrath of God*, *The Mission*, *One Man's War*, *The Burning Season*, *La Muralla Verde*, and *The Emerald Forest*. The second group, *At Play in the Fields of the Lord*, *The Mosquito Coast*, and *Green Mansions* are complete fiction, two from well known novels, but realistic in nature; that is, the people and events are invented, but the background is historically correct. My purpose in using fiction is to expose students to differences in the perspective of the film makers. These films were

made by Spanish, North American, Peruvian, and British film makers between 1957 and 1997. Most are in English; some are subtitled. I will use them in themes, in groups of two to four films, to contrast perceptions and attitudes about issues of the rain forests.

My topics of focus include: Discovery and Conquest, Political Divisions, In the Name of God, The Fate of the Indigenous Peoples, The Haves and the Have Nots, The Burden of Eternal Vigilance.

Unit goals are, first, to create interdisciplinary or across curriculum lessons, to make connections between teaching Spanish language and culture, to teach ecology through understanding how rain forests relate to ozone depletion, to study prehistoric people and the history of the Americas, to distinguish geographical and political boundaries and the conflicts between these, and to promote the responsibility we share as stewards of the Earth.

The lessons presented in this unit are: I What is a hero? villain? II The Geography inclusive of American rain forests as described in selected films: Amazonia, from Peru to the Atlantic, Alto Paraná, the Orinoco, The Mosquito Coast and interior forests, and the Everglades. III Ecology, selected lessons on endangered species as the manatee of the Orinoco and the Quetzal of Mexico; the environmental cost of deforestation, especially the Brazilian rubber forests and the lands along the Mexico-Guatemala border. IV History, to include Spanish Exploration, Conquest, and the Division of the New World, and the 20th Century struggles for Justice.

Part 1: Villains and Heroes

These five films, *Cabeza de Vaca*, *Aguirre: the Wrath of God*, *The Mission*, *One Man's War*, and *The Burning Season*, very different in style, about different eras, different countries, different kinds of protagonists, may seem at first to be unrelated. As we study them we discover that they are in fact linked in significant ways to political issues of Latin America. They were made with North Americans in mind. They are all intensely political. They are about heroes and villains, about evil or about sacrifices and martyrdoms suffered. They are about people who came upon injustice and couldn't ignore it; perhaps that is the definition of the modern hero. Or about obsession which leads to evil.

In fact, many Latin American films are about unexpected political heroes. Latin American art, literature, daily conversation and film are infused with politics and religion in a way very unlike North American arts. It is an irony home out by statistics of political elections: in North America where political freedom is taken for granted, people seem disinterested; a small percentage of eligible voters go to the polls. In Latin America, where the freedom of speech has been gravely threatened in many countries many times, political opinion is a part of daily existence. The often recalled "sixties" in the USA is the closest I can come to imagining what we would be like if we were as interested in our political life as Latin Americans are. Perhaps that is why I am so intrigued.

Cabeza de Vaca

To understand the Spanish conquest and exploration of the Americas, it is important to have an understanding of the historical context from which it emerged. From the departure of the Romans until the late 14th century, the Iberian peninsula was comprised of several separate kingdoms, and several languages. In 711 A.D. Spain was invaded by Muslims from across the Straights of Gibraltar. This invasion was partly fed by the religious conviction that the spread of Islam was a the duty of true believers. Energy also derived from the Crusades,

which continued for centuries in the Christian attempt to recapture their Holy Land from the Moors. Spanish armies fought over 800 years to expel the Moors from Spain, but small kingdoms were unable to organize the forces needed to succeed. In 1478 the Kingdoms of Castille and Aragon were united by the marriage of their rulers, Ferdinand and Isabela. In 1492 the Crowns of Spain put into effect three major actions which had far reaching consequences: the Moors were finally expelled from Spain, and Spain was declared a Catholic country; non-Catholics were required to convert or leave the country; and funds were provided by the thirty three year old Queen to finance a voyage to find a shorter route to the Indies.

Europe was on the verge of major change. The power and authority of Rome were coming into question. In 1483 Martin Luther was born; in 1509 Henry VIII was crowned King of England. Rumblings were beginning about the changes in church history for which Henry VIII and Martin Luther would be credited. But in Spain, the new religious fervor took another direction. Having expelled the Infidel from the Iberian Peninsula, Spain believed herself to be the last defender of the Church. She believed that it was her destiny and her glory to fill the Church with new souls and gold. The next hundred years in Spain are called the Golden Century, El Siglo do Oro. The impetus for exploration, for gold and for Christianity, was great.

The men who left Europe on Spanish expeditions brought a mix of motivations. Columbus' vessels were filled by men who left Spain rather than convert from Judaism to Catholicism. Later expeditions such as those of Cortés and Pizarro had combinations of men of nobility, men without claim to their families' estates, whether because of illegitimacy or because they were younger sons, and men who were escaping other unfortunate fates.

Jlvar Nu-ez Cabeza de Vaca was descended from a hero of the wars against the Moors. This ancestor soldier had marked a trail with the skull of a cow, for which he was rewarded with the name, Cabeza de Vaca, and a title. His heir and namesake was equally respectable and reliable and had distinguished himself in service to the crown several times prior to the voyage west. He was appointed Royal Treasurer to the expedition to Florida led by Pánfilo de Narváez, whose ship was wrecked on the coast of Florida. Cabeza de Vaca and three other survivors wandered for eight years over a thousand miles until they arrived, probably in what is now West Texas, where they were reunited with Spanish conquistadors. The journey changed him, from a Spanish soldier in helmet and breast plate whose mission was to convert souls for the church, to a naked healer who understood the lives and beliefs of tribal life, so much so that when he was found, he was not recognized as a Spaniard by Indians or Spaniards. When he returned to Spain, he applied for a grant to further explore Florida, but was passed over in favor of Hernando de Soto. Relaciones, his recalled account of the journey, was written at this time, and published in 1555. The manuscript was dedicated to the Princess, Mary Tudor, who married Philip II in 1554. The adventures of Cabeza de Vaca received enough attention for Cabeza de Vaca to be awarded honor and rank. He was sent as Viceroy to the Rio de la Plata, which included most of South America east of the Andes. Here his understanding of native peoples dominated his decisions. He ordered the clergy to protect the Indians, and decreed that mistreated Indians be removed from their masters. He soon had alienated the Spanish nobility and was overthrown and returned to Spain under arrest. However the significance of his actions in Paraguay were to have long lasting consequences, and contributed to the survival and integration of the Guarani in modern Paraguayan life. The film, "Cabeza de Vaca," covers the events from ship wreck to rescue, but his appointment to Paraguay connects him to "The Mission."

The film, *Cabeza de Vaca*, is a visual experience, though it is filmed in Spanish and indigenous languages with some subtitles. The sets are bleak, the costumes original, the changing scenery mysterious. The entire film leaves the viewer a sense of dislocation, as the marooned Spaniards must have felt. The verbal exchanges do not inform the listener of the motives of the characters; events seem random. However the movie follows very

closely selected chapters from Cabeza de Vaca's journals. In presenting the film to a class, prereading and discussing these selections will be invaluable.

My objectives will be that students understand the motives of the Spaniards, Cabeza de Vaca in particular. Second, students will recognize the change that comes over Cabeza de Vaca during his eight year journey. His growing respect and empathy with the indigenous people will be important later. We will begin our discussion of what is a hero by listing qualities of heroism, and particularly heroic qualities of Cabeza de Vaca, such as endurance, independence of thinking, strength.

Students will make connections between the film and history to Spanish painters, particularly Diego Velázquez' dwarfs of the Spanish court, and the surrealist landscapes of Salvador Dalí. Dwarfs were akin to pets in the courts of Spain. Families sold their misshapen sons, who were then raised as members of the court, well treated and even educated, but not free to leave. Velázquez made several paintings of individual dwarfs, or Fantastics as they were called. His paintings are classical in the sense of composition, but his use of light, and of perspective create an powerful editorial comment. He captures the wisdom and sorrow of these unfortunate souls. Some were extremely intelligent and functioned as royal advisors; others had visible signs of mental deficiency. Velázquez' message is a merciless indictment of this bizarre custom. In the film a character in the early scenes is a dwarf. Slowly this character grows in the eye of the viewer from a strange and cruel monster to a respectful and caring teacher.

Velázquez was the forerunner of Goya, and Goya was a precursor to Surrealism. Salvador Dalí was an important surrealist painter, and sometimes difficult to fathom. Here is a teachable moment for surrealism for non-art teachers! The last scene in *Cabeza de Vaca* is a broad desert plain with no features but desolation. Across the plain march a battalion of Spanish soldiers in armor. They are carrying a huge cross. It is a surreal scene, but in the context of the film easily understood. Dalí painted a few landscapes which are echoed by this vision. The one which resonates in me is "The Temptation of Saint Anthony," 1946. Anthony is kneeling on a vast and empty plain, holding up a cross against an oncoming column of fantastic animals, giant horses and elephants bearing palaces and naked women and towers.

The last activity will be the beginning of a personal atlas of Latin America. This first map will trace the probable route followed by the four Spaniards from west Florida to west Texas. This will be an opportunity for students to begin to understand how much of the USA was part of the Spanish Empire.

Aguirre: the Wrath of God

The novel, *Aguirre: the Wrath of God*, was written from a journal of this first European navigation of the Amazon, from the Andes to the Atlantic. The movie was made from the novel by a German film maker, Werner Herzog, as a metaphor for Hitler's arrogant assumption of power in Germany, and perceived descent into madness.

Aguirre is an absolute contrast to Cabeza de Vaca. Like the latter, Aguirre was a Spaniard who came to the New World to further his career. He was an officer in Francisco Pizarro's conquest of the mighty Inca, lords of the Andes. However while Cabeza de Vaca was forthright and noble, and Cortés was educated, Pizarro, and his brothers including Hernando and uncle Gonzalo, and his officers were cut of rougher cloth. Pizarro was an illegitimate child, illiterate, raised as a peasant in Extremadura, the dry ranch land of western Spain so like the dry southwestern USA. He was brave, pitiless, and single minded. He had been with Balboa when the Pacific was discovered. Soon afterwards, stories of gold began to flow north to Panama. Pizarro rode south, racing Diego de Amagto to Cuzco. It took as little time for Pizarro to decimate the Inca as it had taken Cortés to

conquer the Aztec Empire. Still hungry for gold, he ordered an expedition to cross the Andes and go down the Amazon in search of the mythical El Dorado, a city of gold now understood to be an invention by the Indians to divert the Spaniards. The leader of this expedition was Gonzalo Pizarro, uncle of Francisco, with orders to hunt for El Dorado east of the Andes. Factual information about this excursion is difficult to acquire. Innes¹ reports the excursion in 1540 led by Francisco de Orellana down the Napa tributary, with Orellana as author of the journal from which this film is derived. Herzog claims the monk, Gaspar de Carvajal, kept the journal of the 1560 excursion down the Huellaga tributary. Whatever the facts, in the film when Gonzalo encounters a tributary of the Amazon, he sends a group of forty ahead to find food and El Dorado, and to return in one week. The scouting party did not return, but floated down the Amazon arriving at the Caribbean island Cubagua a year later, having found no gold.

The film begins as the huge party descends into the jungle from the heights of the Andes. Don Lope de Aguirre is Deputy to Commander Don Pedro Ursua. Aguirre, played by Klaus Kinski, is a humorless man, increasingly possessed by the fever to find gold and claim land. As he gradually sinks into his obsession, he takes whatever action he believes will hasten his goal. He begins on a minor scale, undetected, but soon we hear the whispers, "If we don't stop him, what will he do next?" The flooded jungle prevents the men from hunting or salvaging food. They catch some fish and are able to reach fruit occasionally, but salt is unavailable in the rain forest. Aguirre murders those who oppose him, and drives the survivors toward their death of malnutrition, unseen forest archers, and madness. He vows to take Mexico from Cortés, and Spain from Ferdinand II. As the film ends, they are nearing the mouth of the Amazon, and Aguirre has proclaimed himself emperor, claiming as his empire Amazonia, Peru, the New World and Spain.

Gonzalo's troops spent the year struggling back to Cuzco, losing half of their number. Francisco Pizarro was assassinated by followers of his rival, Diego de Almagro, in 1541. The Spanish Empire continued, oblivious to Aguirre.

Aguirre's unquenchable evil will inspire additions and deletions to our list of heroic qualities. Greed, obsession and pride are as evident in Aguirre as humility, compassion and generosity are in Cabeza de Vaca. We will compare the antagonism between Pizarro and Almagro, which was mimicked in the decades to come by the succession of bitter rivalries among the powerful *caudillos* of Peru, to the legacy of compassion left by Cabeza de Vaca in Paraguay. Students will trace on a map of South America the route Gonzalo and later Aguirre took from Lima to the Caribbean. We will begin to discuss the ecology of this great rain forest, the problem the soldiers encountered in finding food and salt.

The Mission

Throughout Latin America the Spanish confined the indigenous peoples to communities which were connected to economic production, called Encomiendas or Reducciones. Most of these provided slave labor for the mines or the fields. In what is now Paraguay, and proximate sections of Argentina, these communities were called Misiones, missions. They were different from the slave holdings throughout the rest of the Spanish dominated Americas. We see the influence of Cabeza de Vaca's experiences with the indigenous peoples of North America. We know that he was driven out of Asunción by the Spanish who objected to his protection of the Indians. The missions in Paraguay were managed by the Jesuit Order as communal societies. Protected from European abuse, the Indians produced what they needed with surplus to trade. In most areas the process of setting up the Misiones was not confrontational. *The Mission* is about the native peoples, the Guarani, above Iguazú Falls, also called Alto Parand, deep in the rain forests on the borders of Paraguay and Brazil, where Europeans had explored very little; the Guarani who lived there were aggressively resistant. The story of the movie is the effort of the Spanish Jesuit Priest, Father Gabriel, played by Jeremy Irons, to create a mission

above the falls, and to protect the forest people from the Portuguese slaver Rodrigo Mendoza, Robert DeNiro, who enters the jungle and captures by any means whomever he could, This dramatic and panoramic struggle is played against an intense political confrontation for power in Latin America between Spain, Portugal, the Jesuit Order, and the Pope. The result was the expulsion in 1767 of the Jesuits from Spain and all Spanish realms. An interesting footnote to the film was the presence of Daniel Berrigan, SJ, as advisor to Jeremy Irons and actor in the role of one of Gabriel's priest allies. Berrigan has a personal and philosophical perspective on the power struggle between the Jesuits and Rome particularly in times when the political necessities as identified by Rome are in conflict with the moral imperative identified by individual Jesuits. His name may sound familiar; as a major activist in the anti Vietnam War movement, along with his brother Philip who forced the debate on marriage for Catholic priests by marrying a nun also active in the anti war movement, Elizabeth McCallister. Berrigan kept a journal, including photographs, of the filming.

The Mission is a beautiful and haunting dramatization of the background leading up to the treaties between 1759 and 1767 which divided Alto Parand between Spain and Portugal. At stake were the Spanish Jesuit missions, protective and collective communities of Guarani. Detailed historical information relevant to and lesson plans for "The Mission" are in a previous Curriculum Unit, "Dividing the Spoils: Portugal and Spain in South America," by Jeannette Rogers Gaffney, YNHTI 1992, Volume 11, Number 6.

We turn again to our atlas of Latin America. We identify the boundaries of modern Brazil and Paraguay and the location of Iguazú Falls. We identify the drainage area of the Parand, and distinguish it from the great Amazon basin. We also locate the original boundaries of the Line of Demarcation, the Treaty of Torredesillas (see 92.02.06).

The second lesson returns us to our discussion of heroes. Father Gabriel is a traditional hero: he is a non violent resister, a pacifist, gives his life to others, is wise and just and has great integrity. He cannot be tempted into violence or disobedience. Rodrigo is another type of hero: a convert. His self inflicted penance for a life of violence leads him to exchange that life for a life of the cloth, but when it is time for heroism he risks eternal damnation to fight heroically the only way he knows how. Is one more of a hero than the other? Is violence or non-violence a measure of heroism? Is giving your life without a struggle to teach your belief more or less heroic than giving up your soul to save others?

One Man's War

One Man's War is a fair movie about the true story of Dr. Joel Filartiga, whose son was tortured to death in 1977. I lived in his family for six months in 1978. The story is more powerful than the screenplay describes, despite the talents of Anthony Hopkins and Norma Alejandro. For the author's personal connection to "One Man's War" see YNHTI 1997, Volume 1, No. 7, Rogers, "Latin American Short Fiction," beginning p. 123.

Joel Filartiga is a real person, with qualities both laudable and regrettable, as are all heroes. In talking about the qualities of the heroes of these movies, we will have little access to their humanity except in the case of Joel, my friend. His reality makes him no less a hero. We will have defined heroic qualities as courage in the face of danger, integrity despite pressure to abandon value, fighting for the benefit to others despite personal cost. In this post Kennedy era of American politics, heroes are exposed for their lesser qualities at the cost of their effectiveness. I want my students to know that heroes are not perfect humans, but people like us who accept the burden of truth. In a sense that makes this movie as useful as the others.

Joel is not slim and elegant like Anthony Hopkins. He is very overweight, and suffers from the indignities of the body. His beatings have left him somewhat lame. He draws with pen on paper, but is not a great artist. Nidia is

not Norma Alejandro. She is the fifty something mother of four, and her only son was tortured to death. Her heart is broken; at the bottom she blames Joel. She is fearful and unsettled. Dolly did come to New York for the trial of Américo Pe-a. She stayed in New Jersey for two years in a community of Paraguayans, where thick paranoia does not mean that there is no “they” out to get you. Her task was successful, but the cost was great. She became overwhelmed by the escapes of the big city, had a breakdown, and took a long time to be able to go home again. Ana Lidia and Katia have married, Ana to the nephew of the former commander of the army. I would have to describe the family as dysfunctional. But I would never belittle their courage or integrity. Through conversation and photographs I will guide my students to understand that being a hero does not require supernatural powers or beauty. Real heroes are ordinary people who do not back away from the truth.

Part H: The Rain Forests and the Outside

The films in the following section deal with the invasion of the rain forest by outsiders in search of land or wealth or Eden. They span 40 years of film making, and show changing perceptions of the rain forest and its inhabitants. Separately or together, the films represent the great vastness of the forest, and its vulnerability.

Green Mansions 1959

Green Mansions was an early rain forest film. It is a magnificent film, with beautiful cinematography of the vast green blanket and dramatic cascades. The actors, Audrey Hepburn and Anthony Perkins, are excellent. The film is dated, however, and shows a North American view of the rain forest and the Forest People which is passé. Anthony Perkins is seeking gold to avenge the murder of his father. Audrey Hepburn is the daughter of a North American hermit and his adored forest wife. The local tribe believes her to be a witch, and barter with Perkins, gold for her capture. He, in fact, is captivated by her and learns the story of her parents. Unwilling to give the natives what they demand, Perkins becomes the unwitting agent of destruction. Sad, as only 1950's romances can be. The forests of Venezuela, Colombia and Guano are fabulous, but the actors who play the inhabitants are not Amazonian, but North American Indian and Japanese.

La Muralla Verde (The Green Wall) 1970

La Muralla Verde, written and directed by Armando Robles Godoy in 1970, is a bold statement about the vanity and power of the political military government, the incompetence of its bureaucracy and its inability to meet the basics of survival. The story is Godoy's own, written from his experience as a homesteader in the Peruvian rain forest. A biting criticism of the administration, *La Muralla Verde* was banned in Peru for many years. The result was increased attention elsewhere in the world. It won numerous awards for artistic merit and was hailed as the beginning of a new genre in Latin American film.

A business man tires of city life- the economy is preventing him from achieving financial security. He marries and decides to go to the rain forest to farm. It takes years to achieve his objective, but finally he takes his wife and baby to the forest, walking several miles into his land from the river. Bureaucracy follows him to the forest; government surveyors cut down his coffee plants. He goes to the city to try to untangle this bureaucratic mess, just as the president decides to visit rain forest Peru, causing all traffic to be halted. In the forest the child, now four, is bitten by a snake. The rush to the hospital for anti-venom is an agony of barriers: the long walk to the river, the infrequency of busses or trucks to carry them due to the presidential visit, the search for a doctor, and finally the search for the man who has the keys to the lock up where the anti-venom

is kept. The boy dies just as the anti-venom is injected. The funeral is a silent ordeal of pickup and canoe. The parents return to the forest.

As in *Green Mansions* we see a position taken by the makers of *The Green Wall* that is now not PC. Only a decade after *Green Mansions*, the rain forest is a romantic return to nature for the city dweller. In the films to follow, the encroachment of settlers into the rain forest is seen as a problem, a threat to the forest.

The Emerald Forest 1985

Reportedly taken from an actual incident, the story is the disappearance of a boy into the rain forest. The father is an engineer on a dam in the forest, and brings his young family to live with him in the adjacent city. His son, perhaps five or six, is fascinated by the forest. He watches the animals and follows leaf cutter ants. He sees the people of the forest, and reports this to his father. Arrows fly and the boy suddenly disappears. His parents look for him for the ten years it takes to complete the dam. After many excursions up stream, the father learns the indigenous language, and finally finds someone who recognizes the arrow as coming from the Invisible People. Meanwhile, the boy has grown up with the Invisible People and married. He goes off to find the Sacred Stones, despite danger from the cannibal Fierce People who are invading the territory of the Invisible People as they are pushed out of their lands by the shrinking forest. Father and son find and rescue each other from the Fierce People. Daddee, as the boy remembers him is wounded, and spends time in the village recuperating. He comes to appreciate this life and to understand that his son is no longer a child of the city, or the Dead World as the villagers call the treeless land, and that he will not come home with him. He returns to the city to tell his wife that the boy is alive, but lost forever. Then the village is attacked and the young women, including the boy's wife, are taken to be prostitute-slaves in a back woods rubber settlement. The boy goes to Daddee for help against a civilization he cannot penetrate with stone age tools. In his journey he realizes that the dam is bringing the Dead World closer. They rescue the women, and escape back into the forest to discover the village has been burned by the Fierce People and everyone is dead. The boy becomes the leader of the new people. He prays to the frogs to bring enough rain to destroy the dam. Daddee agrees with the analysis if not the method, and blows up the dam. The child who is a man slides his canoe into the river to begin again.

Rain forest habitat is well represented in *The Emerald Forest*. We see numerous animals: leaf cutter ants, green river snakes, deer, sloth, porcupine, jaguar, eagles, toucans and parrots. The forest people look fierce; they carry armadillo pouches and sleep in hammocks. They wear loin cloths. The machinations of the film do not detract from its beauty or its ability to help students visualize forest life, and understand the conflict between the Forest People and the Dead World.

Mosquito Coast 1986

Harrison Ford is a man fed up with the bureaucracy of society, not unlike the character in *The Green Wall*. He is less sane, however, possessed by a manic drive to create Utopia in the forest, beginning with ice. This jungle is The Mosquito Coast of Nicaragua. There are indigenous forest people who are suspicious and curious about their new neighbor, bearing an attitude we see in many of these later rain forest films: a tolerant acceptance of the white man's way evaporates when his ideas collapse.

This jungle is muddy and uncomfortable, much like *The Green Wall*. It is no romantic escape from the Dead World. Ford's early successes and later catastrophe's repeat themes from other films. The rain forest is more powerful than the man. The rain forest cannot be forced into acceptance; it bides its time and destroys all. This is in contrast to other films which depict the rain forest as vulnerable, no match for man and machines.

At Play in the Fields of the Lord 1992

Peter Mattheison's 1965 novel from which the film derives is a classic work of fiction with themes of timeless power: man versus man; man versus nature- religious hypocrisy; religious symbols without depth; uncivilized civilization. Filmed in Amazonia, the story takes place at a jungle outpost which contains a Brazilian Catholic Priest and church, a bar with brothel and a North American Christian missionary couple. Darryl Hannah, after whom everybody lusts, is a woman of generous and simple faith and her husband John Lithgow, the confident founder of this mission in the jungle. To this setting come two no-count drifters: half Comanche Louis Moon and his ne'er do well partner on the lam. They appear not to have the right papers for their plane and are marooned. Also come missionaries in training, Kathy Bates, a doubtful and judgmental Christian, her long suffering husband, who is the most faithful of the group, and their ten year old son who is ready to explore. Recently a Catholic mission deep in the forest has been attacked by the forest people, and all the missionaries killed. The local military wants the natives pacified, by what ever means. He wants the plane to bomb them if the new Christians are not successful. Moon becomes full Amazonian Indian in order to help them avoid the immanent threat of expansion into the jungle. The people believe Moon is a god of vengeance. Off to the jungle go the missionaries. They establish a functioning missionary village, with armed guards and recently converted Christian natives. Lithgow and Hannah leave the new missionary family at the village. The boy is accepted by the local children and plays all day with them, naked in the jungle. The man takes his work seriously, recognizes the native Christian conversion as a shallow level commitment, and seeks to attract the Wild Ones with metal instruments and food. Kathy Bates spirals down toward madness, each day more fearful. The boy dies of Black Water Fever, much lamented by the Indians. Kathy Bates loses all touch with reality and is returned to the town. John Lithgow pales in his wife's eyes in contrast to the earnest faith of the other missionary. Moon steals a kiss from Darryl Hannah, which becomes a flu that devastates the Indians. Against all the white people's protest the missionary gives Moon medicines to help them. He goes to the village to do what he can and arrives at the decimated village as the planes fly over, dropping bombs to "pacify the natives." He lies dead, on his back with his arms spread wide in a cross, wife insane, son dead, his mission destroyed and the Indians dead or scattered. But he understands that any contact, whatever its intention, with the outside world will destroy the rain forest people. He understands that he has not understood, and has brought about the destruction of the very people he wanted to help.

The Burning Season 1995

The Burning Season is the story of Chico Mendes, the Brazilian defender of the forest. Born the son of a rubber tapper, and witness to the brutality of the rubber barons, Mendes was determined to become educated so that he might protect his people. He became a lawyer and a charismatic leader in the non-violent struggle to defend the rain forest. He won international acclaim from environmentalists, although he proclaimed that he was not an environmentalist, but a protector of the rubber trees, and thereby the survival of his people who depended on them for their livelihood. He fought off cruel rubber traders, land hungry ranchers, big business and governmental policy. At the peak of his success he was assassinated. But like other heroes, his message was not diminished by death. *The Burning Season* is an important movie to teach rain forest politics.

The film shows a new alliance of forest people, rubber tappers and public figures united to protect it, as well as interested ecologists on an international level. The forest dwellers are not dangerous nor naive. The focus is on united non-violent means to problem resolution, as typical of this decade as each of the other films were of theirs.

Activities and Lesson Plans

Lesson I:

Geography

Geography is the primary link of all the films in this unit. I will use maps to begin teaching.

Materials:

overhead projector

blank transparencies and markers

transparencies of Latin America, showing geographical and political boundaries wall maps of Latin America, geographical and political individual student maps and markers folders

Objectives:

Students will know the difference between geographical and political boundaries, Students will draw the Amazon rain forest and Latin American political boundaries on a blank map.

Students will label the countries adjacent to and within Latin American rain forests. Students will begin a personal atlas of Latin America.

Lesson II:

Film criticism

For maximum benefit students need to watch films with an understanding beyond plot structure and character development

Materials:

Movie review sheet

Objectives:

Students will record impressions of the film as they watch.

Students will compile impressions in a whole class discussion. Students will discuss the film using their own and other's comments.

Lesson III: Heroes and Villains:

In this era of the unveiling of public figures, students don't have heroes as did previous generations. In these movies, several potential heroes are presented. We will explore which qualities create or destroy heroes, and who might be heroes to students today.

Objectives:

Students will define the terms Hero and Villain in group discussion.

Students will create a chart of heroic and villainous traits.

Students will identify individuals in their own experiences who might be heroes.

Students will write a description of someone who is a hero to them.

Students will recognize the powers which reveal the human weaknesses of public figures.

Students will debate the following:

It is in the best interest of society to know the details of the private lives of public figures.

Lesson IV: A persuasive essay.**Objectives:**

Students will write an essay on the conflicts of the rain forest.

Students will select two films to use to compare and contrast aspects of the conflict, either characters, land use, moral dilemma, or other teacher approved topic.

Students will outline their ideas.

Students will discuss their outlines with other students.

Students will write a first draft from this written guide.
Students will critique each others' essays.
Students will write a second draft to hand in.
Students will write a final draft including corrections from draft 2.

Movie review sheet

Name

Date

Name of film

Rain forest flora and fauna:

What animals and plants of the rain forest did you notice during in the film?

Geographical information:

Where does this film take place? What country, what rain forest, what other important geographical features are in the film? (mountains, rivers, cities). Does it take place in the forest or elsewhere?

Heroic qualities: list a character with each quality:

Who are the "good Guys?" What are they trying to do? How are they doing it? What characteristics do they use to accomplish their goals? (non-violence, faith)

Villains: what qualities did each character demonstrate:

Who are the “bad guys?” What do they want? What quality of them makes them act this way? (greed for gold, progress).

Plot summary:

Write a short summary of what happened in the film, two or three sentences. Best part: Which scene or part did you like best? What about it made it best? (exciting, beautiful, got what he deserved or justice).

Worst Part:

What about the film did you like least ? Why? (scary, boring, corny, didn't fit the story).

What or whose point of view does the film represent? Where were the film makers from? What year was it made? Do you detect bias in the view of the makers? Are the bad guys of this film good guys in other films you have seen?

Bibliography

Berrigan, Daniel. *The Mission: A Film Journal*. San Francisco: Harper & Rowe, 1986.

Berrigan was hired as a consultant to Jeremy Irons in matters pertaining to the Order of Jesus (Jesuits). He also plays one of Father Gabriel's loyal Brothers at the mission. Berrigan's poetic journal of the experience adds another perspective to the story.

Bindoff, S. T., *Tudor England*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, Ltd. 1950.

I used Bindoff to straighten out my confusion of the sixteenth and seventeenth European heads of state. They had annoying habits of marrying each other and naming their children all the same names.

Cabeza de Vaca, Alvar Nu-ez, *Relación*, in *The Account: Alvar Nu-ez Cabeza de Vaca's Relación an Annotated Translation*, by Martin A. Favata and Jose B. Fernandez. Houston: Arte Público Press, 1993.

Written a few years after his return to Spain, Cabeza de Vaca's memories of his adventure in the New World are amazing, readable and historically important. It is not difficult to find those sections of the Account from which the film is created. Use of the text also underscores the incredulous amazement the Europeans had upon encountering the cultures so different from anything they had ever imagined. The language is old fashioned, but even middle school students will be able to figure out in discussion what events he is

describing.

Clark, Kenneth, A History of Civilization. New York: Harper & Rowe, 1969.

Clark is a classic of work about the history of art and culture of the western world, but he seems to have been in error on the facts of the Aguirre story. Stick to his knowledge of Europe. There were better records.

Dominguez Ortiz, Antonio, Alfonso E Pérez Sánchez and Julián Gállego, Velázquez. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989.

An art book with good color of the prints. Velázquez is reminiscent of Michaelangelo with editorial comment. His works are beautiful. His career was long and varied. Kids like Velázquez, and they understand and respect his paintings of the *fantásticos* of the Spanish court, one of the more bizarre degradations of humanity.

Elliot, J.H., Imperial Spain: 1469-1716. London: Penguin, 1963.

Self explanatory; a good source for what it says it is.

"The Elusive Quetzal. " National Geographic, Volume 193, Number 6, June 1998. pp 34-45.

The Quetzal, the bird of Aztec mythology, is becoming endangered by the disappearance of its habitat in Mesoamerica.

@Ref:Fehrenbach, T. R., Fire and Blood: A History of Mexico. New York: Da Capo Press, 1995. I am disappointed by the patronizing tone Fehrenbach displays in his discussion of Mexican USA relations. He clearly does not love the Mexican people, however much he is interested in their history. Hodge, Jessica, Salvador Dalí. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1994.

Surrealist great Dalí leaves American adults bewildered. Kids are sometimes less careful of the thin line between concrete and imaginary. Have some fun with clocks that slide. Investigate the illusive nature of time. But watch out. Dalí uses bodies in unusual ways too. The next page might be rated R in middle school

Hudson, W. H., Green Mansions. New York: Dover Press, 1989.

Originally published in 1909, Green Mansions has gone out of fashion. It is a typical nineteenth century romance, mysterious setting, beautiful girl, a little magic. I loved it when I was young but I don't know anyone younger than thirty who has read it.

Innes, Hammond, The Conquistadors. New York: Knopf, 1969.

Photographs of jade masks and Machu Picchu capture the splendor of the ancient American civilizations. Innes has done an excellent job tracing the routes of the various conquistadors. A good book to use with kids: pictures on every page.

Mason, J. Alden, The Ancient Civilizations of Peru. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964.

Classic, both detailed and readable. The Andean civilizations were as many layered as Mesoamerica. Their destruction was even more callous than that of Mexico.

Mattheison, Peter, At Play in the Fields of the Lord. New York: Bantam Books, 1981.

I had read the book long before the movie came out, and I found the movie enriched my understanding. Mattheison is echoing The Heart of Darkness, themes of good and overwhelming evil. It's a good read, intense and well written, but you can understand the movie without the book.

Mendes, Chico, *Fight for the Forest: Chico Mendes in His Own Words*. (Additional material by Tony Gross). London: Latin American Bureau, 1990.

A collection of Mendes' speeches and writings, this is a useful tool to introduce *The Burning Season*.

Minta, Stephen, *Aguirre: the Recreation of a Sixteenth Century Journey Across South America*. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1993.

A great deal of research went into the creation of this very readable historical novel.

Myers, A.R., *England in the Late Middle Ages (1307-1536)*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, Ltd. 1952.

Once again, a resource for who married whom and governed which in Europe.

"The Orinoco River: Into the Heart of Venezuela." *National Geographic*, Volume 193, Number 4, April, 1998, pp 2-3 1.

Gold miners and malaria threaten the life of the Yanomani.

Pendle, George, *A History of Latin America*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963.

I find I use these general dry histories frequently for details as I research new information.

Rogers, Jeannette. "Latin American Short Fiction," *YNHTI* 1997, Volume 1, No. 7.

I wrote a detailed account of my life with the Filartiga's, the family of *One Man's War*. The movie will be much more meaningful if you have read this background information, personal though it may be.

Rogers Gaffney, Jeannette, "Dividing the Spoils: Portugal and Spain in South America." *YNHTI* 1992, Volume 11, Number 6.

In this curriculum I wrote a detailed history of the treaties leading up to *The Mission*. It was confusing, because several treaties were made, and some were not enforced for some time. The result is that it is not completely clear which treaty is being investigated by Rome. It was a two hundred year conflict between Spain and Portugal, finally resolved in the 20th century War of Triple Alliance when Brazil, Argentina and Standard Oil redrew the boundaries of Paraguay, and killed eighty per cent of Paraguayan men between fifteen and eighty.

Skidmore, Thomas E., and Peter H. Smith, *Modern Latin America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Another respected North American text which patronize and degrades Mexico, in particular, in her relations with the USA. Why do people chose to write books about cultures they do not respect?

Filmography

FILM *Aguirre: the Wrath of God*

Klaus Kinski

DIRECTOR Werner Herzog

YEAR 1973

NATIONALITY German

LANGUAGE German, English subtitles
AGE RATING not rated
QUALITY RATING 94 minutes; sophisticated, violent, symbolic; international awards

FILM *At Play in the Fields of the Lord*

DIRECTOR Hector Babenco

YEAR 1992

NATIONALITY USA

LANGUAGE English

AGE RATING R: Nude Indians

QUALITY RATING 3 hours 10 minutes- complex story, but very well made. Shot entirely in Amazonia.

FILM *The Burning Season*

Raúl Julia, Norma Alejandro

DIRECTOR Hector Babenco

YEAR 1995

NATIONALITY USA

LANGUAGE English

AGE RATING Not rated. No nudity or sex; violence.

QUALITY RATING Three Golden Globe Awards. Best movie made for TV. Excellent.

FILM *Cabeza de Vaca*

DIRECTOR Nicolas Echevarria

YEAR 1993

NATIONALITY Spanish

LANGUAGE Spanish and Indigenous, some subtitles

AGE RATING R

QUALITY RATING 1 hour 48 minutes; amazing, mostly visual, 8 International awards.

FILM *Emerald Forest*

DIRECTOR John Boorman

YEAR 1985

NATIONALITY USA

LANGUAGE English

AGE RATING R: nude Indians

QUALITY RATING Surprisingly very good. Lots of rain forest animals.

FILM *Green Mansions*

Audrey Hepburn and Anthony Perkins

DIRECTOR Mel Ferrer

YEAR 1959

NATIONALITY USA

LANGUAGE English

AGE RATING Not rated. 1959 acceptable.

QUALITY RATING 1 hour 44 minutes. Dated. Well received at the time.

FILM *The Mission*

Jeremy Irons and Robert DeNiro

DIRECTOR Roland Joffé

Best Picture, Cannes; Best cinematography, Oscar 1986

YEAR 1986

NATIONALITY USA

LANGUAGE English

AGE RATING PG; nude Indians

QUALITY RATING 125 minutes. Beautiful cinematography, exquisite score, Powerful story, script by Robert Bolt

FILM *Mosquito Coast*

DIRECTOR Peter Weir

YEAR 1986

NATIONALITY USA

LANGUAGE English

AGE RATING PG

QUALITY RATING Harrison Ford takes on the Rain Forest. 20th century search for Eden. The Rain Forest wins.

FILM *La Muralla Verde*

DIRECTOR Armando Robles Godoy

YEAR 1970 (English edition, The Green Wall, 1990)

NATIONALITY Peru

LANGUAGE Spanish; English subtitles

AGE RATING Not rated. No nudity or explicit sex.

QUALITY RATING 110 minutes; beautiful, award winning film

FILM *One Man's War*

Anthony Hopkins, Norma Alejandro

DIRECTOR Sergio Toledo

YEAR 1991

NATIONALITY British- TVS Ltd. HBO Video

LANGUAGE English

AGE RATING PG-13

QUALITY RATING 91 minutes. I am too biased to judge. It is a true story, with inevitable alterations to the facts.

Note: Best Video on Whitney Ave in Hamden and the Yale Film Study Center have most of these films.

End notes

¹Hammond Innes, p308.

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