

**PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY****Biography**

Rigoberta Menchú Tum was born in Guatemala and raised in the Quiché branch of the Mayan culture. Her family was very poor; both children and adults worked picking coffee on big plantations. As a teenager, Rigoberta Menchú became involved in the women's rights movement. Guatemalan authorities were responsible for the deaths of her father, mother, and brother. She became very active in the Committee of the Peasant Union, an organized social reform group. Rigoberta Menchú taught herself Spanish and other Mayan languages in order to communicate with government officials and other indigenous groups. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 for promoting peace and indigenous rights.

What is Rigoberta Menchú Tum's profession? (circle your answer or answers)

- A. Politician
- B. Humanitarian
- C. Musician
- D. Electrician

Answers:
B & C – Rigoberta Menchú Tum is both a Humanitarian and an Activist.

Vocabulary

Humanitarian: One who promotes human welfare.

Indigenous: Persons native to an area and descended from those who lived there prior to colonization

Name two other people who you think are **Humanitarians**:



1.



2.



3.



4.

Can you identify the images above?

1. _____ 3. _____

2. _____ 4. _____

Answers:
1. World Map 2. Central America 3. Guatemala 4. Guatemalan Flag

**POST-VISIT ACTIVITY**

Speaking a group of closely related languages, the Mayan population today is over four million. Occupying parts of Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, and western Honduras, the population was drastically reduced in colonial times due to conflict with



settlers and the introduction of European diseases. Spanish conquistadors quickly gained dominance in the region; the Spanish conquest led to the imposition of Catholicism and the establishment of European political structures. Native elites were killed or included in the system, leaving the majority of Mayans to an existence as rural peasants. The Maya region was less important to Spain than its Caribbean colonies that were more suitable for

plantation-style production of sugar and coffee. Later, during the twentieth century, labor struggles between the Spanish ruling class and native groups led to increased tensions as forced labor and the seizure of Mayan lands became more common.

Racial divisions in the region ran so deep as to resemble a caste system. Spanish speaking whites stood at the top of the social ladder while the indigenous population was positioned firmly at the bottom. Ladinos, those of mixed European and indigenous descent, were strictly differentiated from native groups according to the degree of European heritage they could claim. In the 1970s, the Guatemalan military targeted indigenous groups in order to force economic and social integration. Repression and violence were used to eradicate markers of traditional ethnic identity such as language and styles of clothing.

How does this compare to the history of Native Americans in the United States?

What is something you have learned about the history of native peoples in Central America? Has their situation improved today?

New Vocabulary:

Conquistador—a leader of the 16th century Spanish conquest of New World colonies

Caste—a rigid system that defines social status based on inherited characteristics such as race; caste systems are marked by rules against the mixing of groups, especially through marriage