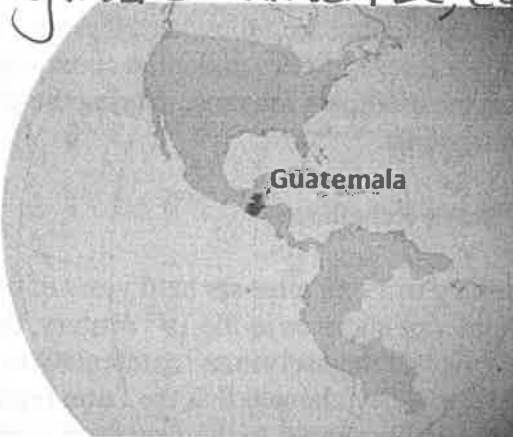


\* Annotate source. To earn credit, you must have 10 notes written in the side margins (summarize, connect, question, paraphrase, define, react, etc...).

The Mayan Genocide in Guatemala	
Place:	Guatemala, Central America
Time:	1981-1983
Perpetrators:	The Guatemalan Government (Latin People)
The Victims:	The Mayan People (Natives)
Number of people murdered:	200,000 People



## Guatemala 1981-1983

In the past, Guatemala was the center of the Maya kingdom, and to this day most of its citizens identify as Mayan. Since the Spanish occupation in the 16th century, a Spanish minority has firmly ruled a Mayan majority. A dynasty of dictators has ruled Guatemala since the beginning of the 1960's. Around 200,000 Mayans in Guatemala were murdered in the civil war that took place between 1960 and 1996. Most were killed in an organized and systematic fashion, primarily during the years 1981-1983.

### Background:

In the past, Guatemala was the center of the Maya kingdom, and to this day most of its citizens identify as Mayan. Since the Spanish occupied the region in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, they and their descendants firmly controlled the local population. In 1821, Guatemala achieved independence from Spain. The independent country, always one of the poorest countries in the Americas, invariably served the interests of the Latin population, and suppressed the Maya and the Ladino (a mixed people), who comprised a large majority of the population.

In 1944, the first free elections in Guatemala were held, resulting in the election of the writer and teacher Juan Jose Arevalo. His socialist policies were heavily criticized by the upper class and by landowners, whose power waned in those years. In 1954 the democratic government issued an order to confiscate land from the American United Fruit Company. In response, the CIA and a small group of Guatemalans (landowners, past army personnel and the Catholic Church) carried out a coup. Colonel Carlos Castillo was named president and served for three years. In July 1957 he was assassinated by one of his bodyguards.

In the following elections, Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes was elected as president. He ruled an autocratic regime which was particularly racist; it discriminated against the Maya and oppressed women in Guatemala. In reaction to Fuentes's racist and discriminatory policies, a group of young officers tried to carry out a coup in 1960. When it failed some of them went underground and forged ties with Cuba. This group comprised the hardcore of the armed uprising against the

regime throughout the following 36 years. They initiated Guatemala's civil war, in which the country's security forces under the command of the Latin Guatemalan regime battled guerrilla forces, most of them Mayans. During the civil war, an attempt was made to exterminate the Mayan people.

### **The Maya Rebellion:**

Beginning in 1960, after six hard years of oppression of the Mayan population that reduced them to an inferior status as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Maya initiated an armed rebellion. The group of rebels viewed themselves as representatives of the people and believed in Marxist socialism. They claimed that the Latin regime in Guatemala enslaved all of the country's human and material resources to the American capitalists. Four guerrilla groups carried out economic sabotage activities, and attacked government security forces. These forces were the "Guerrilla Army of the Poor" (EGP), the "Revolutionary Organization of Armed People" (ORPA), the "Rebel Armed Forces" (FAR), and the Guatemalan Labor Party (PGT). In 1982 these organizations united and formed the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG). The 1999 Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH), sponsored by the UN, stated that the causes for the outbreak and continuation of armed conflict throughout the years were structural injustice, reduction of the political arena, racism, and strengthening of the establishment's divisive, anti-democratic character, as well as an unwillingness to advance actual reforms that could lessen the structural tensions.

### **The Beginning of the Oppression and Massacre of the Maya:**

From the beginning of the 1960s, the regime deliberately inflated the threat posed by the Mayan rebel organizations and classified them as internal enemies. The regime combined all of the opposition organizations under a single heading, democratic and non-democratic, pacifist and guerrilla forces, legal and illegal organizations, communists and others, defining them all as internal enemies. The government promoted the racist notion that the Maya are members of an inferior culture. They claimed that the descendants of the kingdom that was occupied by the Spanish at the start of the 16<sup>th</sup> century were inferior to the Latin people, lazy, barbaric and primitive; therefore, they were to blame for the country's poverty.

The most inferior, according to this racist ideology, were "the mountain dwellers," who lived in the outlying areas. Evidence of this ideology can be seen in the government intelligence training book from 1972, which states that "the enemy has the same sociological characteristics as the population of mountain dwellers." In the face of widespread political, socioeconomic and cultural opposition, largely carried about by the Maya, the government conducted military operations aimed at the physical extermination and total sterilization of the opposition through a program of oppression, primarily carried out by the army and security forces. The Guatemalan army butchered fellow Guatemalans. The definitive majority of victims were not guerrilla fighters, but rather community and union leaders, religious teachers, farmers, and university and high school teachers and students. At the same time, armed Latin groups began to organize, with government assistance. These included the "Secret Anti-Communist Army" (ESA), and "The White Hand" (La Mano Blanca). These organizations tortured and murdered students, professionals and farmers.

## **The Extermination:**

The most severe period of the massacre was from 1981-1983, during which most of massacres and ethnic cleansing took place. During these years five Maya tribes located in the mountainous areas were exterminated. Most of the massacres were carried out by a special military unit nicknamed "The Kaibiles" by its soldiers. Their method of extermination was to massacre the entire population of a village. Six hundred and twenty six such massacres by the Guatemalan army have been documented. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of July, 1982, President Rios Montt was quoted in the New York Times as saying to the Mayan public, "If you are with us, we will feed you; if not, we will kill you." The same day, the army and its allies carried out a massacre in the village Plan de Sanchez, in the region of Baja Verapaz, in which about 250 people were murdered, most of them women and children of the Achi tribe, a Mayan people.

In addition to the massacres, the regime openly enacted a policy called "Scorched Earth," which included the removal of Maya from their lands, claiming that they are not properly working the land. This policy, which led to the removal of between half a million and a million people from their homes, was accompanied by racist propaganda that depicted the Maya as a primitive people who damaged crops and were to blame for the scarcity. This occurred during a parallel boycott of all of their agricultural products. The result of the removal policy was that thousands of Mayans died of starvation and disease, and Mayan tribes were completely helpless and could not continue to preserve their culture and their shared life.

There is evidence of the extermination of a total of 42,275 Mayan men, women and children. Of these, 23,671 were victims of arbitrary acts of murder, and 6,159 were victims of forced disappearance. Among the victims who were identified with certainty, 83% were Mayan and 17% were Ladino. The UN-sponsored Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) estimated based on this data and additional research that the number of people who were killed or disappeared as a result of the genocide is over 200,000. This includes a considerable number of children killed at the hands of the security forces, and many children were left as orphans and abandoned, especially among the Maya population. Additionally, more than 100,000 women were raped, the vast majority of them Maya.

## **After the Genocide:**

In 1994 peace talks between the government and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit (URNG), led by the UN, were initiated in Oslo. In March 1994 an agreement regarding Maya rights was signed in Oslo. The agreement includes a clause calling for the return of the displaced Maya to their lands. In June 1994 an agreement regarding the Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) was signed, according to which a UN-sponsored governmental commission of inquiry would be established to investigate the genocide of the Maya and the Ladino during the years of the civil war, 1960-1994. In March 1995 an additional agreement regarding Mayan rights was signed, after which the civil war ended. The Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH), sponsored by the UN, reported its findings in 1999 and affirmed that "the violence on the part of the state was directed, first and foremost, against the isolated, the impoverished, and, above all, against the Maya." The commission affirmed that during the years 1964-1994 the army carried out 626 massacres and killed over 200,000 people. In 2012 General Efraim Rios

Montt, who ruled Guatemala in 1982-1983, was arrested, as was Oscar Mejia, ruler of Guatemala from 1983-1986. Montt was convicted of genocide, but a corrupt national court annulled the verdict two weeks later. He is supposed to be tried again in 2015 in Guatemala. Mejia was found unfit for trial.

"Combat Genocide | Guatemala 1981-1983." *Combat Genocide | Guatemala 1981-1983*. N.p.,

n.d. Web. 27 Jan. 2016.

\* Write a summary of the source below. To earn credit, your summary must be AT LEAST 10 sentences. Turn in by end of period.