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Ever since the arrival of the Spanish to Hispañola, indigenous cultures of the Americas had to utilize multiple resilience strategies to survive. For the indigenous people of Latin America, they have consistently displayed effective cultural resilience through the centuries by engaging in violent resistance to their invaders, adapting their way of life to rapidly changing situations, and participating in collective political activism to confront adversity, improve their material condition, and reclaim their lands.

It wasn't long after first contact in 1492 that indigenous people began to demonstrate resilience through resistance. Just two years after Columbus' arrival, a chieftain for the first indigenous community encountered in the New World, the Taino, would lead a revolt against the Spaniards exploiting his people for food and gold by torching a Spanish fort and killing ten men.[1] In my first research essay for this course, I presented the story of another Taino chieftain, Hatuey, who crossed the Caribbean Sea to warn others of an impending Spanish invasion. When he was captured and set on the stake to be burned alive, he defiantly declined the opportunity to accept the Spaniards' god, saying that if Spanish Christians went to heaven, he'd rather go to hell to "ensure that he would never again have to clap eyes on those cruel brutes."[2]

Going beyond just resisting, the Araucanians of southern Chile additionally displayed cultural resilience via adaptation to successfully defend their territory by adopting their colonizer's military tactics. They incorporated horses into their war parties, built long pikes to repel cavalry charges, learned how to make gunpowder for the guns they acquired, and adopted guerrilla warfare tactics that reduced the loss of life from their traditional combat techniques.[3] These adaptations allowed them to defend themselves and control their territory for nearly four centuries, succumbing only when technology progressed far enough in the 19th century to give the Spanish a decided advantage with the use of repeating rifles and telegraph lines.[4]

Unfortunately, nearly all other indigenous peoples encountering Europeans for the first time were unable to effectively defend themselves like the Araucanians and would have to adapt in different ways. In the 16th century when Spanish settlers reached the lands of the native Guarani, the Guarani integrated them into their society, utilizing their superior military expertise to protect themselves from raids by other indigenous groups.[5] Together they built a more mutually beneficial society than in other parts of Latin America, with the Spaniards taking Guarani wives and together living in more of a subsistence society as opposed to an economic

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[1] John E. Kicza and Rebecca Horn, *Resilient Cultures: America's Native Peoples Confront European Colonization, 1500-1800* (Routledge, 2013), 40.
[2] Bartolomé De Las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (Penguin Books, 1992), 29.
[3] Kicza and Horn, *Resilient Cultures*, 105.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Kicza and Horn, *Resilient Cultures*, 103.

one.[6] Within just two generations, nearly all Spaniards were biologically mixed with the Guarani and the colonial Paraguayan society was heavily bilingual and bicultural, with the foods and customs reflecting Guarani ways of life more so than Spanish.[7]

Cultural resilience sometimes came in how indigenous communities practiced faith. Indigenous plantation workers in Brazil created a syncretic religion called *santidade* that combined their traditional beliefs with Catholicism.[8] Practitioners would refer to themselves as bishops or popes and prayed with rosaries to stone idols they believed were imbued with spiritual powers.[9] This faith would later take on a revolutionary spirit when followers started to attack the plantations they worked and the Portuguese communities that controlled them.[10]

In a more modern context, neoliberalism's chokehold on modern Latin America has created serious problems for indigenous communities, from seizure and exploitation of their traditional lands to active terrorism, assassinations, and genocide in retaliation to their political organizing.[11] Despite the danger ever present for them, indigenous communities throughout Latin America have continuously displayed resilience through collective activism, political participation, and negotiation.

An example of activism can be found in the film *When the Mountains Tremble.* Released to a worldwide audience, it shined a spotlight on the ongoing civil war taking place within Guatemala, where the the Mayan people were undergoing genocide at the hands of its Western-aligned government. Its tragedy was emotionally documented through the voice of Rigoberta Menchú, a Mayan woman whose family experienced exploitation, torture, and execution simply for advocating for equal living standards.[12] Menchú's activism was an incredibly brave act, as the film was released during the civil war, thus exposing herself, and everyone who participated in it, to violent retaliation. She would later win the Nobel Peace Prize.

In terms of political participation and negotiation, Bolivia elected its first indigenous president in 2005 with Evo Morales, who appointed indigenous ministers for departments overseeing key areas of concern for their communities, such as the Interior and Water.[13] During the summer of 1994 in Ecuador, after the government passed legislation to break up indigenous communities, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador launched protest demonstrations in the country's major cities and occupied oil wells.[14] These actions forced the

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[6] Ibid.
[7] Kicza and Horn, *Resilient Cultures*, 104; Marshall C. Eakin, *The History of Latin America: Collision of Cultures* (St. Martin's Griffin, 2007), 183.
[8] Kicza and Horn, *Resilient Cultures*, 100.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Sarah A. Radcliffe, "Forum: Latin American Indigenous Geographies of Fear: Living in the Shadow of Racism, Lack of Development, and Antiterror Measures," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 97, no. 2 (2007): 387–88, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4620268.
[12] *When the Mountains Tremble: War and Revolution in Guatemala*, directed by Pamela Yates (New Day Films, 1983), Kanopy.
[13] Radcliffe, *Indigenous Geographies of Fear*, 392-93.
[14] Carmen Diana Deere and Magdalena León, "Institutional Reform of Agriculture under Neoliberalism: The Impact of the Women's and Indigenous Movements," *Latin American Research Review* 36, no. 2 (2001): 47-8, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2692087.

government to the negotiation table which resulted in new laws that enshrined rights to ancestral lands for Ecuador's indigenous, Black, and mestizo communities.[15]

Indigenous cultures have been absorbing adversity and displaying resiliency ever since the fateful day in 1492: the Taino and Arancuanians resisted and fought back, the Guarani and plantation workers of Brazil adapted, and the Mayans and indigenous people of Bolivia and Ecuador engaged in activism. To do so for over five centuries, against overwhelming odds, proves the strength of indigenous cultural resilience. The struggle continues.

[15] Deere and León, *Institutional Reform of Agriculture,* 48.

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