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#### Book Review:

Menchú, Rigoberta, edited and introduced by Elisabeth Burgos-Debray. *I, Rigoberta Menchú: an Indian woman in Guatemala*. Verso, 2010.

Rigoberta Menchu was born on January 9, 1959 to a poor indian peasant family and raised in the Quiche branch of the Mayan culture. In her early years she helped with family farm work, either in the northern highlands where her family lived, or on the pacific coast, where both adults and children went to pick coffee on the big plantations. Rigoberta Menchu became involved in social reform activities. She was awarded with the Nobel Peace Prize in November of 1992. *I Rigoberta Menchu* is a book that recounts the remarkable life of Rigoberta, her story reflects the experiences common to many indian communities in Latin America today. *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, is the final product of a series of interviews and collaborations between Rigoberta Menchu and Elisabeth Burgos-Debay. Menchu lends her narrative to the book and depicts the harsh and brutal existence in Guatemala. This book gives details of racism, classism, injustice, poverty, violence, language barriers, and other forms of oppressions indigenous people suffered from.

The amount of pain Menchu and her people endured is beyond belief. Torture, forced disappearances, military raids, unjust eviction and racism became common occurrences. From an early age, Menchu witnessed the plight against her people by the landowning ladinos. The Indians were constantly starved and malnourished as well as exposed to the harsh chemicals found in the pesticides. Her younger brother dies of malnutrition at the fincas. The working conditions were terrible for the indigenous communities, low wages, and hard work. How can this be possible? How can people like Rigoberta and others, who worked hard, not get paid enough to have a good meal to eat. This was common for Rigoberta and her community. Many Children died from malnutrition. At a young age, the parents of these same children, made it clear that suffering was apart of their lives. Out of ten, only a few are expect to survive the harsh living conditions. Extreme poverty surrounded them. Their hard work was something landowners took advantage of, by not paying them a good salary.

Through the whole book it is clear that there are language barriers. The fact that the different indigenous communities couldn't communicate with other indigenous communities, put them at a disadvantage. Rigoberta mentioned that there were all these neighboring communities they would go work at, as her family would go do at the "fincas". But they couldn't communicate between them, because they spoke a different

dialect. When Rigoberta's father was in jail, the community got together and worked as hard as they could to get him out. They hired a translator, but he was not translating what they were actually saying. Also when they give them the contract to sign they also signed a contract that was written in Spanish and they didn't even know what they were signing, until two years later they came to bother them again and tried to kick them out of their land. Rigoberta, later learned Cakchiquel, Mam, Tzutujil as well as Spanish through listening and memorizing.

Through the whole book we see injustice. One form of oppression we see is classism. The richest people hold the power and the land. Rigoberta's brother is tortured, and burned alive. Her mother, raped and tortured, until her death. Lastly, her father also was killed. Along with this violence, soldiers continuously raped the women of the community. Rigoberta was a brave woman and even though most of her family was killed, she continued to fight for the rights of her people. She became the organizer and eventually the leader of CUC.

I highly recommend this book, it was hard to put down after opening it. It makes you aware, and at the same time, makes you cringe. Not only does one become educated about the hardships the indigenous people went through, but also about the Mayan culture. It will most certainly enlighten one as they read.