

UPDATE on the AMERICAS

A bi-monthly publication of the Rochester Committee on Latin America

A Taskforce of Metro Justice

Winter 2012

ROCLA's February Program

Guatemala: Crafts and Resistance, Cultural Identity and Community

Wednesday, February 1, 7 PM, Downtown Presbyterian Church
121 N Fitzhugh St. Rochester

The February 1st ROCLA monthly program at DUPC will feature member Marilyn Anderson presenting *Guatemala: Crafts and Resistance, Cultural Identity and Community*. Marilyn has been an active ROCLA member since 1982 when she and Jon Garlock visited Chiapas and the camps of Maya refugees who had fled the violence of the civil war raging then in many parts of Guatemala.

Broad questions about crafts and resistance will be considered along with the important role of Maya women weavers. We also will consider weaving as metaphor and its everyday place in people's lives. To do this she will draw from her efforts as a photographer, artist and author. She first learned to weave on a backstrap loom in the 1960s, later moving to work on human rights issues, Fair Trade and collaborations for Maya children's crafts education.



Some of the questions she hopes to answer:

- in this globalized world, what is the place of weaving and other traditional arts in the lives of Maya peoples and other Guatemalans?
- How does globalization affect craft production? How does the political / economic situation affect weavers and other craft workers?
- What happened to weaving during the armed conflict of the 1980?
- What is the present day role of Fair Trade, weaving and crafts?
- What is the place of crafts education for children in Guatemala?

Slide images will accompany the talk covering the 1970's and her last three Guatemala trips after 2000.

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Critique of *Tambien La Lluvia*

- Letter to the Editor by Doug Noble.

Thanks to ROCLA for bringing us this fine film. However much I enjoyed and was moved by the film, I do want to share with you my concerns about it (which I suspect you have). Despite highlighting the parallels between the Columbus massacres and the exploitation/ oppression of current Bolivian indigenous people, the film remains disturbingly Eurocentric throughout. This was most clear when the film producer was asked to help the young girl: privileged white man to the rescue. Instead of showing how much these filmmakers (of the Columbus film) could learn from Daniel and the others about how people join together to fight corporate abuses, the movie minimizes these achievements of the Indians.

I was blown away by the occupation of the square, the street barricades, the eloquent democratic strategy meetings. How did Daniel become a leader? How did the people learn how to do all this? And how did the protests successfully defeat the privateers, especially given the explicit racism and brutal use of force by the government? None of these questions were even raised, let alone answered. You would certainly agree that we activists here have a lot to learn from these indigenous achievements, but this film, disappointingly, did not provide these lessons. Another film does, perhaps.

Nonetheless, it was a very enjoyable evening and I was delighted to see such a large turnout. So thanks again.

Doug

A contribution and commendation from Robert Lynch, Director of the Geneseo Migrant Center.

Oct. 25, 2011

Enclosed is a check for \$100. This donation to ROCLA from the GMC is in recognition of the work of ROCLA's SC members Arnie and Callie. Both Dr. Matlin and Callie have been involved with the MC. Their dedication in addressing the needs of Latino and other disenfranchised groups is most impressive, indeed.

MINUSTAH

—by Brian Concannon
White Dove Award
Recipient



MINUSTAH, the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Haiti, has an outrageous impunity problem. Today it was announced that the 5 Uruguayan MINUSTAH soldiers caught on video raping a Haitian youth last summer were released. This incident follows a long pattern of injury and injustice. On December 14, UN soldiers from Brazil illegally arrested and brutally beat three men who were guarding their broken-down water truck in Cite Soleil. The cholera introduced to Haiti by MINUSTAH is now the world's worst cholera epidemic, killing over 200 Haitians a month. None of these incidents have led to justice for the victims or punishment for the perpetrators.

Each of these outrages has followed a familiar pattern, established over the seven years of MINUSTAH's presence. The UN first denies responsibility. When irrefutable proof of its responsibility is made public, MINUSTAH announces an investigation. The resulting investigations are usually flawed and delayed, and almost never result in a public attribution of responsibility or known punishment of the perpetrators.

The *Bureau des Avocats Internationaux* (BAI) and the Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti (IJDH) are fighting back against UN impunity, with a historic case filed on behalf of 5,000 cholera victims. Our case seeks compensation for our client's losses, but more importantly it demands that the UN provide the water and medical infrastructure necessary to control the cholera epidemic.

The BAI-IJDH cholera case is a giant lever of justice that uses a modest investment in legal fees to force the UN to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in clean water and healthcare in Haiti. On a broader scale, our lever is helping to lift the impunity that allows UN Peacekeepers around the world to get away with rape, torture and even murder every day.

[The author is Director of BAI/IJDH in Haiti.]

ANNOUNCING

Worker Justice Center of New York/Centro de Justicia Para Trabajadores

The WJCNY represents the joining together of Farmworker Legal Services of New York and the Workers' Rights Law Center of New York.

WJC provides free legal services and legal education for New York's farmworkers and workers in other low-wage industries who experience problems in the workplace, regardless of immigration status. WJC assists with wage and hour issues, discrimination, sexual harassment, contract violations. www.wjcny.org

Brian Concannon, Jr. To Receive National White Dove Award for DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS IN HAITI At Gala 2012

Rice and Beans/White Dove Award Dinner

MARCH 2, 5:30 PM: Make your reservations now for an evening of camaraderie, fun, feasting, and celebration! To a background of Haitian music you can bid for the remarkable Silent Auction items, savor rice and beans, salsa and salad from the incomparable Peg Gefell, enjoy a buffet of desserts, and celebrate the 2012 White Dove Award recipients. Most importantly, Brian Concannon will talk about the state of human rights in Haiti.

Brian Concannon, Jr., Esq., Director of the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti (IJDH), will receive ROCLA's International White Dove Award on behalf of IJDH and its Haitian affiliate, Bureau des Avocats Internationaux (BAI).

Bob Kaiser, ROCLA's Convener, and **Marilyn Kaiser**, Membership Chair, will be honored with ROCLA's Local White Dove Award for their long-term leadership, for tireless completion of day-to-day administrative chores, keeping ROCLA morale high and the organization on course.



The Live and Silent Auctions are a highlight of the evening. Lory Ghertner, pilot, has offered again this year his fabulous private plane ride over the Finger Lakes. And Bob Good's rustic cabin in a quiet beautiful setting on top of a hill near Honeoye Lake will be available in the summer.

Do you have a specialty to offer?

A dinner? Vacation cottage? Theatre tickets? A basket of homemade goodies? Please let Callie Rabe (582-1322, crabe@allendalecolumbia.org) or Sue Rabe (243-3163) know what you would like to donate.

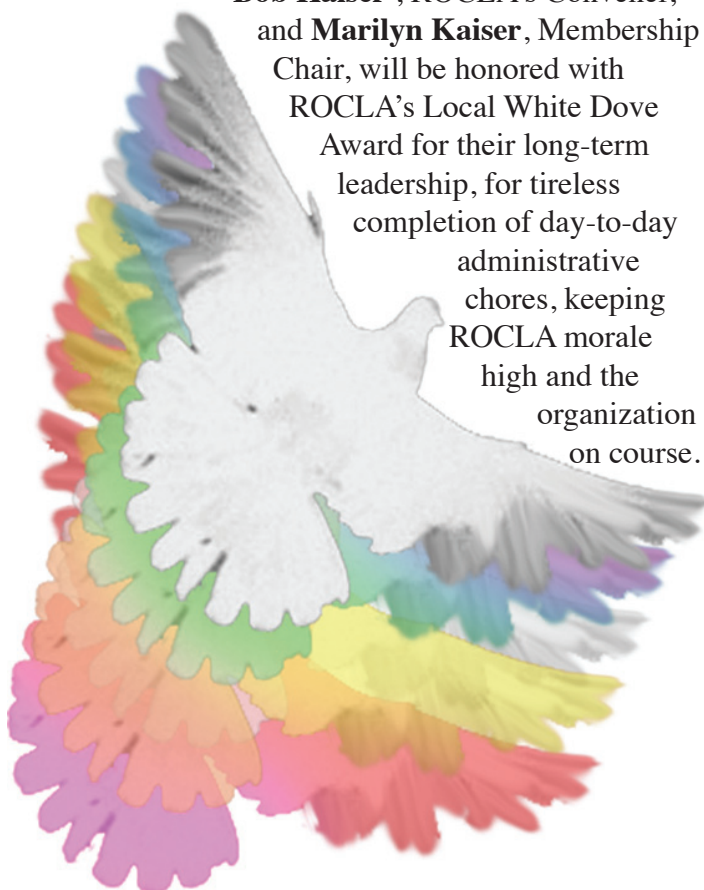
Everyone looks forward to *The Dessert Table* – delectable offerings from ROCLA members. If you would be willing to contribute your favorite dessert please contact Gloria Osborne at 669-9915 or turtlekneader@hotmail.com.

TICKETS: Patron, \$40
Sponsor, \$2
Guest, \$15.

Checks payable to ROCLA/Metro Justice. Patrons and Sponsors will be listed in the program (unless you would prefer that we not do that.)

FOR RESERVATIONS: The Kaisers, 293-3194; rkaiser3@rochester.rr.com

We look forward to seeing you at ROCLA's major fundraiser. Your presence and contributions will support ROCLA's work in solidarity with the people of Latin America.



Boiled Corn For Dinner

— by Joseph Sorrentino

Ana opened her refrigerator. “Look,” she said, “it is almost empty.” Then she did the same with her freezer. “Almost nothing,” she continued. She turned to the stove which had a single large pot on it. She lifted the lid revealing a dozen or so boiled ears of corn. “This is all we have for dinner,” she said. “That and maybe some bread.” Antonio, her husband, added “Well, there might be some cheese.” This wasn’t happening in some developing country but in a town about an hour from Rochester. And it wasn’t poverty that had reduced them to this meager meal. They both work full-time and although not wealthy by any stretch of the imagination, the money they earn could easily buy them food for dinner. The only reason their dinner was just some corn and bread is because they’re Mexicans who are working in the US illegally. Immigration and Customs Enforcement had been particularly active and they were afraid to risk going out to shop for food.

Actually, it’s rare that they even had fresh corn. On a previous visit, when Ana opened her refrigerator it was to show me what she had inside. “We have no fresh fruits or vegetables,” she said. “We eat canned and frozen foods. We never know when Immigration will be outside the house or waiting outside the store so we buy extra canned foods when we can.”

Ana and Antonio, like thousands of Mexicans who work on farms across the US, plant, tend and harvest the food we eat. The day they came home to that meal, Ana had worked eight hours sorting onions and Antonio had worked ten hours pulling weeds in a field. How ironic is it that the people who provide us with food sometimes cannot even eat it themselves?



The war has not been won, despite recent claims

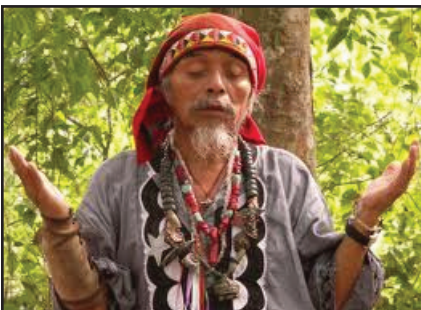
—by John L. Ghertner, MD

The US government under Mr. Obama has claimed that the war has been won. 1,200,000 prisoners have been taken. The central force of resistance is in shambles they claim. The enemy’s weapon supplies are dwindling and there is no fight left in the opposition, the newspapers claim.

In fact, these stories are all wrong. The plight of the farmworker today is just as grievous as at any time in our history. 400,000 “illegal aliens” have been deported just last year, at least half are fathers and mothers or even sons and daughters whose only crime may have been as egregious as driving without a tail light or riding in the back seat of a car. One of my students, just accepted to The State College at Brockport to complete her degree, is now in deportation hearings because she was riding in the back seat of her father’s car; at least the First Amendment is still protected; she was not going to church, she was merely returning home from church.

Yes, there is a larger Army than ever attacking the unauthorized population of this country. With “only” two command posts in the region, on Pattonwood Dr. in Irondequoit, and in Oswego, the army of immigration agents has been expanded to all State Police officers who continue to hold immigration roadblocks and allow Border Patrol agents to ride in state vehicles. And local police forces in Monroe and surrounding counties continue to actively support the efforts to wage this war.

And our elected officials speak a lot of the victory: Governor Cuomo claims that he doesn’t need the Secure Communities Program (S-Comm), a nationwide sweep of all noncitizens, visitors, and citizens who don’t look “American” in his state, because he has his police force, the State Police, to ride rough shod over the immigrant population. President Obama says we don’t need to break up all these families, but as his spokeswoman just said, “As long as Congress gives us the funding to deport 400,000, that is what we will do.”



WHAT THE MAYAN ELDERS ARE SAYING ABOUT 2012

- by Carlos Barrios

<http://lettertorobin1.site.aplus.net/id435.html>

From exploiters We Must Become Stewards

— by *Pacho Lane*

A recent New Yorker cover shows a brown desert studded with saguaro cactus, crossed by a tall wire fence topped with barbed wire. Through a hole cut in the fence - running to the Promised Land - are the Pilgrims.

I can't think of a better way to express the irony of our current border war with Mexico.

We - us European-Americans - are the migrants who stole the land, and now we (or at least many of us) think we own it - and that we are justified in keeping the descendants of the original inhabitants from entering "our" land.

Before Columbus "discovered" the "New World", hundreds of indigenous tribes spread throughout the continent - there was no border, and no fence. The most advanced civilizations - Olmec, Maya, Totonac, Aztec - were in central Mexico and Yucatan. Traders exchanged not only exotic goods - jade, parrot feathers - and, especially, corn - but also legends and rituals, with the Pueblos of the Southwest, the Moundbuilders of the Midwest, and the tribes of the East and West coasts. There may even have been Totonac and Maya settlements in what is now the Southeastern US!

When Cortés landed on the Gulf Coast of Mexico, he was welcomed as a god. When the Pilgrims landed on the Atlantic Coast, they were welcomed as guests. All too soon, the "Native Americans" learned that we Europeans came not as gods or guests, but to enslave and destroy. To steal their lands - and to fence them out. Why? Because we had the True Faith while they were Ignorant Savages.

The US-Mexican frontier is the only border in the world between a developed and a developing country. One of many ironies is that the land on the US side of the border - Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California - was once part of Mexico, seized by the US in 1848. Today, the border has become a militarized Iron Curtain, designed to keep out "illegal" migrants from Mexico and Central America - most of whom are indigenous or of indigenous descent.

Since the 60's, there has been increasing interest among "Mexican-Americans" in strengthening indigenous ties with Mexico. My film, "The Eagle's Children", documents "chicano" participation in the Danza de la Conquista, or Concheros, a Mexican indigenous revival movement that now has adherents across the US.

This year I finished "Warriors of the Sun", my second film on the 2000+ year old Totonac Indian Danza de los Voladores (Ritual of the Fliers). Also this year I was invited - twice - to attend a Lakota Sun Dance - first in Western New York, and then in Mexico. I was amazed to learn that there are now over 350 Sun Dances across the US. Far more amazing was to discover that the Lakota Sun Dance has spread to Mexico! Lakota and other

"Native Americans" shared the Sun Dance with their "Native Mexican" brethren - and learned from them in return. Something is happening. But will it be soon enough?

While there is no way to prove a common origin, the similarities between the rituals are striking. Both center on the Sun, and on the Tree Of Life, to which the dancers are attached by ropes. In the Sun Dance, the warriors communicate with eagles or hawks. In the Voladores, the dancers are warriors reincarnated as eagles or hawks. It only remains for the two traditions to meet and exchange stories! (I'm working on it!...)

Cuauhtemoc, last ruler of the Mexica ("Aztecs"), prophesied on his deathbed that one day a new Sun would rise, and that the native peoples of the Americas would be reunited. In some ways, his prophecy may be beginning to be realized. Whether or not the December 2012 solstice is the beginning of the Fifth Sun, the spread of rituals such as the Concheros and the Sun Dance - and, perhaps of the Voladores - offer hope of rethinking our fundamental relationship to the environment.

The central idea of the Concheros, the Danza de los Voladores, and the Sun Dance is that it is by our sacrifice that we keep the world in balance. That is, our job is to be stewards, to care for the planet, rather than to exploit it.

We are now experiencing the consequences of the rape of the environment which we - especially us European-Americans - not alone, but certainly in the vanguard - have imposed on the planet. If we are to avert global catastrophe, we must change the way we think about our place in nature. From exploiters we must become stewards

So the war against unauthorized immigrants must not be over. One of my friends just returned from Mexico on foot after he was removed from his trailer park and family for the third time. His choice was to leave behind his wife, three children, and grandson or to return. We are still on the streets, in the newspapers, in the halls of Congress and state legislatures fighting with the only weapons we have: our voice and our cameras.

And many agencies, nonprofit organizations, and advocacy groups have come together to form the Greater Rochester Coalition for Immigration Justice (GRCIJ). Our purpose is to coordinate and to educate the community about the struggle of the immigrant population living among us, living in the shadows. And we invite any other interested groups to join us in our fight for Constitutional Rights and the moral rights of everyone living in this country.

Mexico Shelter Founder Speaks About Struggles to Help Brutalized Migrants\

Tuesday, February 14th, 7:30 PM, Basil Hall (room 117), St. John Fisher College, 3690 East Avenue, Rochester, NY

Padre Alejandro Solalinde Guerra, human rights activist and founder of the “Hermanos en el Camino” migrant shelter in Oaxaca, Mexico, will talk about Migration and Human Rights at St. John Fisher College Tuesday, February 14th. His shelter has become a frontline in the fight against increasingly organized and brutal attacks on undocumented Central American migrants in transit through Mexico.

The National Human Rights committee of Mexico estimates that over 11,000 migrants were kidnapped in Mexico in a six-month period in 2010. The shelter founded by Padre Alejandro is part of a system of over fifty shelters and food kitchens that have emerged along the unauthorized migratory route to the U.S.

Hermanos en el Camino, opened in 2007, provides a short respite from danger. It provides food, access to hygiene products and facilities, medical care, legal support to victims of crimes, a place to leave behind important information for family members in the event that migrants disappear during their journey, and spiritual support. It has become a staging ground for numerous protests and has launched Padre Alejandro into the national political fight against human rights abuses in Mexico. Because of his activism, Padre Alejandro has received numerous death threats and was spotlighted on the Amnesty International Urgent Action List.

Despite the danger, he continues his work without fear. “I am reflecting on the meaning of Migration. It is the path of the poor. I am convinced that they are changing the world with their presence...Of whatever culture, politics, religion, or gender, they are constructing a common denominator of humanity.”

This event is free and open to the public.

Co-Sponsors: 13 local organizations belonging to the Greater Rochester Coalition for Immigration Justice (GRCIJ), including Catholic Charities of Wayne County, Justice Council of the First Unitarian Church of Rochester, Migration Working Group of the Presbytery of Genesee Valley, Rochester Committee on Latin America, St. John Fisher College, Sisters of Mercy, Sisters of St. Joseph, Spiritus Christi Church, The Interfaith Alliance of Rochester, Wayne Action for Racial Equality, Worker Justice Center of NY and Office of Social Policy/Catholic Family Center.

After I Pick the Fruit

a documentary by Nancy Ghertner.

93 minutes including the credits. Follows the lives of five immigrant farmworker women over a ten-year period as they labor in the apple orchards and fields of rural western New York, migrate seasonally to Florida, raise their families, and try to hide from the Bush-era immigration raids that were conducted in response to 9/11. Filmed in New York, Florida, and Mexico, this intimate, bittersweet, feature-length film illuminates a community that is nearly invisible to most Americans, and will change the way you look at our national ‘immigration problem. *After I Pick the Fruit* will donate the proceeds from DVD sales and speaker awards to support women and their families through projects at FLSNY, WARE, and RMM in upstate NY. <http://www.afteripickthefruit.com/>. It had its first screening at St. John Fisher on Nov. 3 and is now available from Nancy Ghertner.

GENEROSITY

At every ROCLA meeting there is an Amnesty International Urgent Action postcard appeal. We pass around a basket with the cards, let everyone know that we will mail them out, and say that we would welcome contributions toward the postage which is 98 cents. At the January meeting it was a surprise and delight to find that someone had put in a \$20 bill. Muchas gracias, Amiga/o!

ROCHESTER COMMITTEE ON LATIN AMERICA (ROCLA)

ROCLA for many years has sought to be a bridge between the Rochester community and the people of Latin America. Monthly meetings on the 1st Wednesday of each month at the Downtown United Presbyterian Church provide an opportunity to learn more about what is going on in that part of the world. In addition to providing information, ROCLA is committed to working for systemic justice and supports numerous organizations that are on the front line of this endeavor. School of the Americas Watch, the Mexico Solidarity Network, Rights Action and the Rochester Labor Film

Festival are among the many groups that receive assistance and encouragement.

ROCLA Steering Committee

Marilyn Anderson, Peg Gefell, Bob and Marilyn Kaiser, Arnie Matlin, Lew Montemaggi, Sandy Morales, Peter and Gail Mott, Gloria Osborne, Callie Rabe, Vic Vinkey, Tom Ward

Update on the Americas Publishing Team

Editors: Gail and Peter Mott; Designer: John Locke