

REFLECTIVE ESSAY: TESTIMONIOS

1. Description and Purpose

The [first] assignment of this course is a reflective essay on memory, objectivity, and truth in primary sources known as *testimonios* (testimonial literature). *Testimonios* are a uniquely Latin American literary form that emerged in the turbulent times of the 1960s, specifically in Cuba in the wake of the revolution. Several authors in the region turned to the poor, marginalized, and powerless to uncover their experiences of daily life, labour, religion, and revolutionary politics. *Testimonios*, then, are a cross between documentary writing and autobiography, often produced in collaboration between an academic and subaltern. One of the most widely read works of the *testimonio* genre is *I, Rigoberta Menchú* (1983), an account of the Mayan activist Rigoberta Menchú Tum. While in exile in the early 1980s, Rigoberta shared her life story with the Venezuelan anthropologist Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, who in turn recorded, edited, and published the interviews in an autobiographic form. In 1999 the American anthropologist David Stoll questioned Rigoberta's account, suggesting that she not only left things out but that she in fact "lied" about several details, conflating her personal experiences with other indigenous communities in Guatemala. After reading through Rigoberta's account, your task is to write an essay addressing the value of her book as a primary source. What does her *testimonio* teach us about revolutionary and counterrevolutionary activity in Guatemala between the 1960s and 1980s? What does it teach us about indigenous people in Guatemala during the same time? Does it matter if all parts of her testimony are "literally" true and specifically happened to her and her family? Before carefully examining *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, you should read through the essays by Greg Grandin cited below.

2. Important Details

Due Date: To be determined (email before midnight)

Length: [XX] pages (double-spaced, 12-font, Times New Roman)

Sources:

- Rigoberta Menchú Tum. *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, trans. Ann Wright, ed. Elisabeth Burgos-Debray (London: Verso, 2010).
- Greg Grandin, Deborah T. Levenson, and Elizabeth Oglesby. "Roads to Revolution." In *The Guatemala Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011): 281–285.
- Greg Grandin. "A Victory Described in Detail." In *Who is Rigoberta Menchú?* (London: Verso, 2011): 1–31.