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## The Mayan People and Sandy (Shelton) Davis: Memories of an Engaged Anthropologist

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# **The Mayan People and Sandy (Shelton) Davis: Memories of an Engaged Anthropologist**

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“Most observers are in general agreement that the purpose of the Guatemalan army’s counterinsurgency campaign was as much to teach the Indian population a psychological lesson as to wipe out a guerrilla movement that, at its height, had probably no more than 3,500 trained people in arms. In essence, the purpose of the campaign was to generate an attitude of terror and fear—what we might term a ‘culture of fear’—in the Indian population, to ensure that never again would it support or ally itself with a Marxist guerrilla movement.” (Shelton Davis 1988)

“Indigenous peoples have historically been the poorest and most excluded social sectors in Latin America. They have not only faced acute discrimination in terms of their basic rights to their ancestral property, languages, cultures and forms of governance, but also in terms of access to basic social services (education, health and nutrition, water and sanitation, housing, and so on) and the essential material conditions for satisfying life.” (Shelton Davis 2002)

## **INTRODUCTION**

As much as Shelton Davis is known for his seminal work about Brazilian Indians and development, *Victims of the Miracle* (1977), during the time of its publication and afterwards he was also active as a Mayanist, helping Mayan immigrants and Mayan people in Guatemala. It is the purpose of this essay to highlight Shelton Davis’ work with the Mayan people during the 1980s. To do this I interviewed three activists who had known Shelton for many years[i]. Their own biographies intertwine with the life of Shelton, who was known as Sandy to his friends. They are Jeronimo Camposeco, Father Frank O’Loughlin, and Dr. Jose Barreiro[ii]. During the early 1980s all of them worked with Sandy Davis on projects concerning the Maya, especially Mayan refugees. Jeronimo Camposeco knew Sandy Davis the longest, beginning with Davis’ doctoral fieldwork in Santa Eulalia in Guatemala to Davis’ activism among Mayan immigrants in the United States. Camposeco is a Jacalteco Maya who speaks fluent Kanjobal, and he met Shelton Davis during the late 1960s while working for National Indigenist Institute (*Instituto Indigenista Nacional*) in Guatemala. Later, Camposeco worked with Shelton in founding the Corn Maya, Inc. in Indiantown, Florida and Ixim in

Los Angeles, California, both non-profit organizations supporting Mayan refugees. Father Frank O’Loughlin first met Sandy in the early 1980s in Indiantown during Davis’ activism with Mayan refugees in Florida and Los Angeles. Father O’Loughlin was the priest who provided sanctuary to the numerous Mayan refugees who came to Indiantown, Florida in the early 1980s. Dr. José Barreiro met Davis in 1978 while Barreiro was an Associate Editor of the national Indian newspaper, *Akwesasne Notes* and, during the 1980s, they worked together in helping Mayan people in Guatemala and Mayan refugees in Florida.

The narratives of Camposeco, O’Loughlin, and Barreiro are thus partial representations about Shelton Davis and memories about him during the 1980s. It should be remembered what a tumultuous period it was for the Maya of Guatemala during the 1980s. According to the Report of the Commission for Historical Clarification (*Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico*, CEH, 1999), “there were at least 200,000 victims of political violence in Guatemala, either ‘killed’ or ‘disappeared,’ the majority of whom were indigenous Maya” (Linstroth 2009:144). This period of time known as *La Violencia*

may be characterized as one of the worst in the twentieth century—where whole Mayan villages were burned and destroyed, men, women and children massacred, and women viciously raped, and so many tales of untold atrocities. As a result, Mayan individuals and families began emigrating *en masse* from these war zones. Most often those indigenous communities from northwestern and northern parts of the country were caught in the middle between guerrilla paramilitaries and the Guatemalan army. (Linstroth 2009:143-144)

Because of the Guatemalan military’s “scorched earth policy,” the mass exodus of Mayan people numbered some “500,000 to a million and a half people in the most intense period from 1981 to 1983, including those who were displaced internally and those who were obliged to seek refuge abroad” (Linstroth 2009:145).

Shelton Davis should be remembered for his role with the displaced Mayas but also in preventing a massacre in Guatemala as will be described below. He was an engaged and active scholar and as an “engaged” anthropologist, his engagement may be characterized as “the heart of the anthropological movement to really relate not only to study but also to assist” (Barreiro, personal communication). As Victoria Sanford asserts:

Advocacy and activism do not diminish the validity of one’s scholarly research. On the contrary, activist scholarship reminds us that all research is inherently political—even, and perhaps especially, that scholarship presented under the guise of “objectivity,” which is really no more than a veiled defense of the status quo. (Sanford 2006:14)

By being active Davis demonstrated his humanity toward his subjects and as Barreiro describes Davis “was completely egoless about his work.” Yet Shelton Davis had many other noteworthy traits, as Father O’Loughlin explains:

The biggest thing for me is the presence of Sandy Davis, like was he had a very remarkable presence, right. He had in a way; it’s your field [anthropology]. He had a *quiet* to his presence; a peacefulness. So I was remembering, I was writing to myself in the car, his *solicitous* manner, that was a very striking feature that he had. Taking him to

meet all the folk [Mayans] who were recent refugees in those days, this kind of *dreamy* effect he had. *Very calming gaze*, like when he talked to the people [the Kanjobal Mayans] when making contact. And then how did he get stuff, he had an *expectant kind of smile*, right. When I was in the car and I was coming up, writing down to myself. He had a *listening voice*...That's where it came across massive. Do you know when he spoke, he would attempt the language [Kanjobal] of the people, right? When he spoke, he used to speak in a very slow, precise, very slow, very precise, right, he would place the words, and then he had this huge *diffidence*. Everything he said to you was diffident in the sense he was inviting you to come forward and respond to you.

(Interview with Father Frank O'Loughlin, December 13, 2010)

It is notable therefore to understand that these narratives of his colleagues and friends represent Shelton Davis not only for his activist engagement but for his personality as well. This essay is thereby a reflection about the activism of Shelton Davis during the Cold War period of the 1980s and how his efforts substantially helped the Maya people. It begins with his role in the immigration hearing of Kanjobal refugees, followed by his effectiveness in helping to prevent a massacre of Mayas near Chimaltenango in Guatemala. Lastly, there is Davis' biographical description of Pascual, a Kanjobal Maya, as representing the trauma of fear and therefore parallel to my own work with Kanjobal Maya refugees in South Florida.

## THE HEARING OF KANJOBAL REFUGEES AND SANDY DAVIS

Thousands of Central Americans were killed during the 1980s or were “displaced by civil wars in their countries.” By 1990 it was believed that nearly one million Guatemalans, Nicaraguans, and Salvadorans were living in the United States most of whom “arrived illegally across the U.S.—Mexico border” (M.C. García 2005:160). The passage of the 1980 Refugee Act ensured that a majority of Central Americans would never receive asylum. “A petitioner for asylum now had to prove a well-founded fear of persecution for reason of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion” (M.C. García 2005:161). The Reagan administration characterized this Central American migration to the United States as an economic issue rather than as political situations in home countries. Therefore, few refugees from Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador were granted political asylum (M.C. García 2005:162)[iii]. Additionally, the Reagan and Bush administrations also resisted the calls for a protected status that would allow Central Americans to remain temporarily in the United States until conditions in their homelands improved.

Immigration legislation allowed for such a protected status: “eventual Voluntary Departure (EVD) is a discretionary status given to a group of people when the State Department determines that conditions in the sending country

make it dangerous for them to return” (M.C. García 2005:162). EVD status had been granted to numerous other groups but not to Central Americans because it was believed “the violence in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala was not sufficiently intense or widespread to warrant such an action” (M.C. García 2005:162). Also, the number of potential EVD claimants would be overwhelming whereas: “it was one thing to grant EVD to 5,000 Poles when martial law was imposed in Poland in 1981; it was quite another to grant EVD to the 100,000-plus Salvadorans believed to be in the United States by 1983” (M.C. García 2005:162).

It is unimaginable the hardships many faced on their way to seek refuge away from Guatemala. I have described these memories of Mayans who had “travelled on foot to seek refuge in the United States or *El Norte*” (Linstroth 2009:140). Many of the Maya men and women who managed to make it across the U.S.-Mexican border experienced countless adversities and difficulties whether in the refugee camps in Mexico or from ruthless “border guides” (*coyotes*). As Loucky and Moors describe:

Thousands and thousands sought refuge in Guatemala’s cities or by crossing borders to Belize, Mexico, and beyond. This unprecedented flight initiated the contemporary Maya diaspora, which now finds tens of thousands of Maya dispersed across the face of Central and North America from Costa Rica to Canada. (Loucky and Moors 2000:3)

Of the Guatemalan-Mayans living in Florida there are approximately 29,000 to 60,000, numbers that reflect variations in underestimating the population as Hispanics from census figures (Linstroth 2009; Burns 2002; US Census Bureau 2000; Hiller, Linstroth, and Ayala 2009). Aside from the Guatemalan-Mayans living in Florida, there are also the massive remittances in general being sent back to Guatemala by Guatemaltecos living throughout the United States, which total “more than 2.5 billion dollars” (Kahn 2006:168; Linstroth 2009:141).

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) detained many migrant workers in Florida by loading them on buses and deporting them back to Mexico through Brownsville, Texas[iv]. It is therefore important to provide the background and demonstrate the significance of the atmosphere in which nine Guatemalan-Mayans were detained by the INS and what it was like before Indiantown, Florida became a safe haven for many Mayans during the 1980s. The following are excerpts from an interview with Father Frank O’Loughlin concerning the role of the INS and its effects upon migrant workers in Florida during this period:

**Father Frank O’Loughlin:** They [United States Immigration and Naturalization Service] would stop the bus, a busload of workers on their way to work. The migra [INS] would have their own bus there, as the people got off the bus, the labor bus, they [migrant workers] would sign a voluntary departure slip, right? And they would go directly onto the migra’s [INS’] bus and then they [migrant workers] would be taken right to Brownsville [Texas] and put right across the border at Brownsville. It was as simple as that, right. They [INS] would pull into small towns. They [INS] would load a bus of people and off they would go. They [migrant workers] left babies

lying on the side of the road. Now this is literally true, left them in the dust while taking their parents with them.

When the people were presented with this opportunity of a voluntary departure slip, they [migrant workers] did it, it had some advantages. One of them was, you were not formally deported and so upon your return, you did not have it on your record that you had been formally deported...the other thing was, you had to pay for that. So whatever money you had on you, you had to pay for your voluntary departure. So of course Jeronimo has money and of course I never had any so they took his money to pay for me. There was a lot of wacky stuff like that and this going on. Anyway, I was running up and down the state [of Florida] and saying to farm worker communities—do you realize how few migras [INS workers] there are? Do you realize how few judges they have? What a pokey little operation this is, and it is making havoc out of all of our lives so we have to resist them. It is expensive for you personally to resist them only to this extent. You have to go to jail if you refuse to sign voluntary departure. They will have to book you in somewhere, they'll probably rent space from a local sheriff or something, but they will book you in but if enough of us do it, it will bring their little machine to a standstill. We used to go on and on about the funnel and how easy it is to block the funnel, right. The effect of a migrant pulled out of a migrant camp in Indiantown and being put across the border in Brownsville was what? He [migrant worker] immediately went looking for a *coyote* [someone to get him across the border] to get him back to Indiantown where his wife was, he believed, at risk in some labor camp, or his children were at some risk. He [migrant worker] was really exploitable then. So when he got back to town, he now incurred a big debt. So now he [migrant worker] was in peonage, right. So he had to pay off, so he would get one day, [corrected himself], one week out of every four weeks of the crew boss who contracted him in order to pay the coyote.

**JPL:** What years were this?

**FFL:** This was kind of standard procedure in the 70s and 80s, [Jeronimo corrected him] 70s. Anyway, I get into this racket of running up and down the state [of Florida]; all over the place we are doing this. We put a few people together. So if people were at mass, right. When people were in [Catholic] Mass, as the mass ended, we would shout out, right. We would come in the doors and shout out: "Everybody stay where you are, nobody moves!" And we would go through a border patrol exercise. Then we would say, sit everybody down, now what did he say? And so can he [INS worker] do that? Is that legal? Can he place the whole place in detention like that? Well, he [INS worker] can if he has a judge's warrant. Who is going to ask him [INS worker] about the judge's warrant? Because if he doesn't have it, he's illegal, right. If he is now, what is his name? Who got his name, what is his name? We would train everybody to take his name. We do not want to sue the migra [INS]. We do not want to sue the Justice Department. We cannot afford to do that but we want to sue his ass. So when he goes home, his wife says what the hell are you up to? Why you? So his boss at work instead of saying you are one of us says to him what are you getting into dadada. What was the number on the car? So we started training everybody to do this kind of thing and very, very quickly people developed a sense of resistance and so on.

Father O'Loughlin demonstrates his activism as an engaged priest and community organizer, helping migrant workers throughout the state of Florida. Father O'Loughlin's history of engagement meant protecting farm-workers and migrant families, establishing a sanctuary for the Mayans in Indiantown, founding the Guatemalan-Maya Center in Lake Worth, Florida, and countless other selfless deeds. In a true sense, Father O'Loughlin is a "community priest" and by definition one of "those priests, of whatever ethnic background, who see their spiritual ministry as also involving being part of community struggles in areas

such as civil rights, workers' rights, community empowerment, and community identity and self-respect" (M.T. García 2005:78).

Shelton Davis first met Father O'Loughlin in Indiantown, Florida, during O'Loughlin's activist days with that community and in helping the Mayans find sanctuary[v]. As O'Loughlin remembers it, Davis showed up in Indiantown, Florida, with José Barreiro and he remembers Shelton Davis sleeping on his couch during those days and holding some conversations with him then. During the early 1980s, Shelton Davis was pivotal in helping to found the Corn Maya organization along with Jeronimo Camposeco to aid not only Kanjobal Mayas, but also all Mayas and their families in finding work and transitioning to the United States. (Shelton also founded a similar organization in Los Angeles during the same period.) However, 1983 was a turning point for the Maya people and Indiantown, Florida because of the immigration hearing over eight Kanjobal men and one Kanjobal woman. The case itself opened the way for Indiantown, Florida, to be a sanctuary for Maya people seeking refuge from the civil war in Guatemala. Shelton Davis was involved in creating an affidavit booklet for the nine defendants about the plight of Kanjobal Indian refugees from Guatemala. This booklet was instrumental for all subsequent asylum hearings and trials for the Maya as the immigration defense lawyers used it for basic information about the Mayas.

Father O'Loughlin explains how these nine Kanjobal Mayas came to be arrested in Indiantown, Florida and what ensued from then on.

**FFL:** One night they [migrant workers] come ramming on the door at the church and they [migrant workers] say they [INS] just picked up six men and a woman on the street in Indiantown [the actual number is eight men and one woman]. And so let's go. Who are they, nobody knew them, all they knew was they were loping along in a peculiar way and they were walking single file. That struck even the Mexicans as being, you know, different. So anyway, we go looking for them. Eventually, a couple of weeks went by and we never found them. Normally, you see, people were being held in the local sheriff's department; couldn't find them and then a secretary at Krome, you know the Krome Detention Center, Krome Avenue is out west of Miami [INS Detention Center]. That's where the big border patrol detention center and the secretary at Krome informed us there were six [eight] men and a woman, John Does.

**Jeronimo Camposeco:** Jane Doe.

**FFL:** Jane Doe and John Does, right? And they had refused to speak to anyone since they came in. Well, the game I used to play in all the meetings we did, we used to: "*No Digas Nada! No Firmas Nada!*" [Do Not Say Anything! Do Not Sign Anything!]. We used to do this bah, bah, bah; everybody got this. In those days it was pictures of Our Lady of Guadalupe and on the back of it a psalm about the Lord protecting us from these evil forces and on the bottom was "*no digas nada! no firmas nada!*" And we used to do this bah, bah, bah [clapping in rhythm]. What the people noticed was when the seven [nine] were put into the border patrol van on the main street in Indiantown, when they put them in, they started chanting. So the poor people had been in the meetings and clearly misunderstood this propaganda we were doing. They just misunderstood it. So when they were arrested they thought they were supposed to chant [laughing].

This aspect of the narrative is significant because it demonstrates how influential Father O'Loughlin was with the migrant community and how his instructions not to speak to the immigration authorities were innocently misinterpreted by the nine Kanjobales to chant: "*No Digas Nada! No Firmas Nada!*" Yet what was clearly understood by the Kanjobal detainees was not speaking to the authorities and this is why the immigration authorities had such problems with the Kanjobal detainees because they would not say anything.

**JPL:** Can we just return to the 1980s and 1970s. Was it the 1970s? 1960s. Because he [Shelton Davis] wrote his thesis in 1970. Can you return to some of your memories with him in Santa Eulalia or perhaps even in Indiantown?

**JC:** I guess the most important thing was the contribution, was when the seven, eight people [nine people] were in detention. He was the one person who in many ways convinced the judge that these people were...Of course the judge was supposed to give them asylum. He [the judge] did not want to contradict the Reagan policy at that time. So he just allowed them to have some kind of, what do you call? He gave them freedom on their own recognizance. The judge told Father Frank to take care of them.

**FFL:** Right, he [the judge] made no concession to right to work or anything, no provision for their support, it was unconscionable really. But the snag at that time was that the judges in the immigration court were migra [INS] if you remember. The second problem was, on all these issues, their opinions were received from the State Department. There was a State Department opinion, I'm telling you things you know right. There was a State Department opinion letter, which the judge received, and that was determinate of the outcome.

**JC:** Well, that was a victory in some way because the Maya refugees kept coming and the only way they can be safe is in Indiantown. There is a priest [Father O'Loughlin] over there [in Indiantown in the United States] and he already has the blessing of the judge that he can get them there without immigration.

**FFL:** That was communicated with cassettes. There were people, I don't know how they did all that, there were people down in Chiapas in the jungle were getting cassettes to come. Initially what put Indiantown on the map was, was Roy and Benny Rodriguez, these two rough crew bosses, had a woman down in Texas on the radio was telling people, there was work, housing, and a priest [Father O'Loughlin] that would protect you from the migra [INS] [laughs].

**JPL:** They were talking about you.

**FFL:** Yeah right, which actually implicated me.

**JC:** Some immigration called him [Father O'Loughlin] up from Texas.

**FFL:** Well, there was a smuggling investigation that the migra [INS] were running. Course, you always wonder how they [the Mayas] discovered Indiantown. The first day that we were in court. They took forever before we ever had a political asylum case heard. You know all that. There were several factors. One factor was that they [INS] could never come up with any translators, and we were careful that they [INS] could never come up with any translators. But there were a lot of other factors. Then when they finally decided they were ready to hear cases, the court, Peter Upton was the *numero uno* lawyer, Rob Williams sitting behind him but immediately behind Peter Upton was Jeronimo who was the one who would protest constantly[vi]. They [INS] got an evangelical preacher from the Church of the Word out in California to be the translator. So, Jeronimo was there protesting every translation, boom, boom [snapping his fingers]. Would jump up and object.

**JPL:** So what year was it that Sandy was with the seven people, was it the seven people? [nine people]

**JC:** I guess '82...I came in early '83. They were already in detention when you called me. They were caught, I guess, in late '82 and late '83. At the end of the year was those hearings or in the middle of the year, I don't remember. It was building a team of protectors, lawyers, expert witnesses, an interpreter like myself, to tell their own story. And the judge knew that. The paper Norteño was present, of course the New York Times. It was an effort that everybody was together.

**FFL:** The thing, the thing that's interesting was that, political asylum refugee status and so on, was that it was all founded on European experiences, people from northern Europe who had asylum, right. So it's doctor so and so. And it's the local mayor who are the claimants. Now we come along with people from the Highlands of Guatemala who have no identity. And those kinds of categories at all. And so it's a completely...They seemed to be quite unready for that. The court is asking you to produce, which makes sense in other circumstances, and so the big project at the time was to put together a master exhibit. And the master exhibit was to make a claim for people who couldn't be said [whose names could not be said]. For God's sake, people could not name themselves remember. They actually, they could not name themselves to the satisfaction of people who emerged from a twelve-year school system. They couldn't give you a birth date, right.

**JC:** That's right, yes; you know they have another world. They were living in their own world in the United States so it was very hard to try to incorporate into the American way of life mostly in legal situations like that.

**FFL:** So a person like Jeronimo, right, is struggling all the time; is trying to be the bridge but in the authority, Sandy Davis is like a game changer. Because he takes down the claims of the guy who had twelve years of local school and he validates your way of functioning. I remember doing intake was just absolutely impossible. Do you remember?

**JPL:** I did intake with you, do you remember?

**FFL:** Well, there ya go. I'm always telling about Juana, right, right, your father's name is Juan and your husband's name is Juan and so you are the Juan of the Juan of Juan and I am just wondering how we put this bloody thing together. There was, right? It really, there was a stage where, because of the farm worker stuff. I had done a lot of different groups had done, did a lot of documentaries. There was an Italian group, there was a Swedish group. Now there's a BBC group. And I am going out to the fields and picking people up to be interviewed by the BBC. And I cannot get 'em to repeat the story that they have already told me. I am after pulling their file. There was never a way to get people, and you keep thinking, despairing of ever going into court and ever deliver the same story. The day I am telling you about, where Peter Upton is the lawyer, and Jeronimo is sitting behind him, interrupting the translations and so on. We have a woman who came to us when she appeared to us in Indiantown, she had a deformed spine, Petrona right?

What Father O'Loughlin and Jeronimo Camposeco portray here are the memories of just how difficult it was to represent the Mayas. Most of the Mayas had no formal education and therefore there was a clash of systems, trying to tell the stories of hardships and overcoming extreme forms of violence, and making a case for them. As O'Loughlin mentions, he could not get the same person to tell the same story to reporters and wondered how such testimonials would be upheld in a court system.

**JC:** Yes Petrona.

**FFL:** And Petrona would tell you, her spine was deformed by a bad move by a doctor who gave her a bad injection. Well anyway, Petrona's story was that the military came to her house, killed her father in the doorway, and then went, as she told it, skinned her two brothers alive, and I cannot even imagine what that would mean, and used a baby as a soccer ball, a new baby, raped

her and her mother, right. And put the two raped women to making a meal for them [the soldiers] right. And when the soldiers were otherwise occupied the two women just ran into the corn, disappeared. And never saw one another again. Petrona searched for her mother in the camps, in the jungle, in Chiapas, for her mother and was told go to Indiantown, and how weird was that, right, and how in the name of God, do you go to Indiantown? And she made it, this woman right, with the deformed spine made it, and I had a little sewing co-op and she worked in the sewing co-op. And she, so now we are in front of the judge right, and the judge says, “so your father is dead, so your brothers are dead, right, what’s your case?” Now he literally said that. I swear to God, he literally said that. And I used to never be able to tell that story without gagging.

**JPL:** Sandy was there as an expert witness?

**FFL:** He wasn’t at that.

Petrona’s story is significant even though it does not directly relate to the nine Kanjobal defendants because of the insensitive treatment in general by the immigration bureaucracy and the immigration courts to immigrant defendants seeking political asylum. Her story in front of the immigration judge portrays how callous some of the judges were to the plight of people who had survived the atrocities of *La Violencia* in Guatemala.

**FFL:** So we went to Krome, and we’re here to represent the John Does, and I came home with the seven [nine] of them in this little car and it was fabulous. Like we laughed and laughed, carrying on all the time. And they [Kanjobal defendants] told me they were part of the Bill Woods project[vii]. They loved telling stories about how they cleared this land in the jungle and how they built houses, and one of the big laughs was they were carrying sheets of tin over their heads and the wind would actually pick them up off the ground and they landed on their butts...

They [nine Kanjobal defendants] were all part of what we call in the [Catholic] Church, *Comunidades de Base*, religious life conducted by the groups themselves and just really, really strong and powerful and so on[viii]. And so, when the co-ops came under fire from the government, there is a whole story to that that you probably know more about than I do[ix]. The colonels decided the land was worth something at this stage, they decided to recover the property, right? I think there was some chemical or oil of some kind...

**JC:** Something like that, because it is a very rich area, and it is connected to Peten where there is oil also.

**FFL:** The trucks that were getting stuff out of there were being driven over the cliff, and they were being fired upon actually, and they became part of that new thing of making evangelicals out of these people who were in these *Comunidades de Base*. So, when I met ‘em, the seven [nine] people I brought home, were *Adventistas*, Seventh Day Adventists. They [Kanjobal defendants] were so impressive. The first housing I got built in Indiantown. You are only allowed to put people in with documents, right. But these people were so impressive with their leadership, they were the first people we put into their new house.

It is important to remember that at the time of the immigration hearings in 1983, Shelton Davis was Director of the Anthropology Resource Center in Boston, Massachusetts. While Davis took more of a distant role in the immigration hearings of the nine Kanjobal defendants, according to Jose Barreiro, Davis was instrumental in arranging and helping to organize the defense.

**Jose Barreiro:** He [Shelton Davis] was always responsive to things I remember. He was on the Board of Directors of this Maya Educational Foundation and he was always helping out with school projects in Guatemala educational projects. Well anyway I guess that's kind of the major incident. The work that we did was more with the Kanjobales. I was down there in '83 [in Florida]. I think he is the one who brought it to the attention of the Indian Law Resource Center [in Washington D.C.] in 1983, the fact that this small group of seven or eight [nine] Kanjobal people that were refugees from political violence, that had been, you are probably familiar with the case. They were picked up by the INS and were being shuffled around, and they were even illegally being taken over to the Guatemalan consulate. And he [Davis] was the one who called the Indian Law Resource Center suggesting myself and Jeronimo Camposeco. As a matter of fact, I am not even sure if he knew Jeronimo[x]. He suggested myself because I had been to Guatemala the previous year precisely with a Mohawk delegation and had met Jeronimo there, he had been one of our contacts in Guatemala, and I knew that Jeronimo was living in Philadelphia and already had political asylum early on or he was on his way to getting asylum. And spoke Kanjobal. So we picked up Jeronimo, and I and one of the Mohawk editors of the newspaper and Jeronimo went to Florida. In connection with Father O'Loughlin, as well, we were able to go to the Immokalee Center, the INS Center and interview the folks [the nine Kanjobal defendants] for their stories, which were horrendous stories of massacres and seeing their relatives burned alive and those kinds of stuff, horrendous human rights violations that were going on, but we were able to as a result, debrief the folks [the nine Kanjobal defendants]. I translated the material then from Spanish to English, and we were able to put a brief before the immigration court that resulted in the granting of asylum status to this group, which then I think, according the folks at the Indian [Law] Resource Center, that case opened up that question of refugees for political violence in relation to the Maya of Guatemala. So he was very involved. I lost track a little bit for a number of years of what was going on down there [in Indiantown, Florida], but he never did, he always stayed very close to Jeronimo. And he always helped out that community as much as he could. Always active in recent years of course he traveled a lot to Guatemala.

The thing about Sandy is that he could navigate both high government officials and grassroots people very well. He just was never shy to step up to the plate and interrogate people in high government positions and be very forward, very energetic, and never backed off and, as gentle as he was, one of the gentlest people I ever met, he was fierce when it came to his defense of human rights, and in the case of the Maya, they were really in his heart because he worked in Santa Eulalia for his PhD dissertation. When I asked him for some advice in coming down [to Florida] to initiate that project [Community Museums for the Maya in Guatemala in 2008], he just jumped right to it to help out. He was already in the throes of early stages of Alzheimer's you know, he understood his situation, he knew, we talked about his medical condition, but he just wouldn't hear of not going and doing what he could at that time, right to the end of his life he used his mind in every way he could. It was the hardest thing in the world to see him succumb to that disease. But I have nothing but the highest respect and regard for Sandy Davis. (Telephone interview with José Barreiro, December 16, 2010)

Jeronimo Camposeco's recollections of Sandy Davis during 1983 detail how he remembers contacting Davis rather than the other way around in Barreiro's account.

**JC:** When I arrived once in Boston, Sandy was in my conference, immediately we get together...so we stayed in touch. When Father Frank and George Carr and all the lawyers were looking for some translator or interpreter of Kanjobal. They reached the Acquisition [Akwasne] Notes Indian Paper, and Indian [Law] Resource Center, so they get me, I came here, before I get

here, I call Sandy, “Sandy, I am going to Florida to help the Kanjobales, would you like to help me in something?” “YES! I will support you and write the lawyers, whatever you need.” Immediately he started working on the support documentation of Santa Eulalia and Kanjobales, and working as an expert witness of the Kanjobales and the Mayas of Santa Eulalia and all that area.

At another point in the interview Camposeco tries to be more specific about the circumstances of meeting Shelton Davis again, after years of lost contact while in Guatemala. Camposeco also relates his own role as interpreter and how Davis helped to write an information booklet about the Kanjobal Indians to be used in subsequent immigration hearings by defense lawyers. In addition, Camposeco remembers the circumstances of Shelton Davis helping to found the Corn Maya organization along with Father O’Loughlin.

**JC:** I believe it was Harvard, yes...I remember, I was in Harvard, could be that place. Then after years not seeing each other, we were very glad to see each other. After that, we get in touch almost every day. One moment when they called me down to Indiantown to do the interpretation, the Indian paper [Akwasasne Notes] paid for my trip and some money to survive. So I came here, when I came here [Florida], so lawyers were looking for expert witnesses for this Kanjobal Indians, that have a great claim for political asylum, that involved race, belonging to the community, religion, spirituality, five factors that are really important for political asylum. So they wanted somebody who knows not only the culture but also the specific place where these people are coming from. I reached Sandy, and he was very polite and he said yeah, and he came to Florida. I don’t know if he came when the judge released them [the nine arrested Kanjobal Mayas] on their own recognizance, if he was the expert witness before the judge. Or the lawyer presented his affidavit. I don’t remember that part when Sandy helped us with that...but anyway, anyway, he came here.

**JPL:** It was the early Indiantown years?

**JC:** Yes, ’83.

**JPL:** ’83 he came here. So, was he a key representative?

**JC:** Yes, then he started doing a research and what’s going on in that area. I guess he got a helper; he founded this Anthropology Resource Center in Boston, what’s her name. She was a lady that did very good information. They made like a book and the lawyers used that. They used the book in all subsequent political asylum applications [Sandy Davis wrote a resource book, together with Julie Hodson (staff at the ARC) about the Kanjobal refugees, which all the asylum cases used as a resource.]

**JPL:** They used a book?

**JC:** Yes, I guess the lady’s name Julie Dobson [Julie Hodson], something like that. I don’t remember. So he was helping us, always ready to support, then it was another moment that we needed to do an organization, to help them more in some ways, in more ways systematically. He, and Jose Barreiro, and I told Father Frank to fund an organization, we started doing Corn Maya at that time.

In examining these statements, it is obvious that the realities of immigration for Mayan refugees presented many challenges. Shelton Davis’ influence in aiding the nine Kanjobal defendants was in helping to create a team in order for there to be a viable defense, including having Jeronimo Camposeco

and José Barreiro involved as interpreters, but also in putting together information for a booklet which was then used by the immigration defense attorneys for subsequent hearings of Kanjobal and other Mayan immigrants. What may be stated for certain is that the hearing of the Kanjobal defendants was a watershed case in that the judge, upon hearing the harrowing stories of survival of the group, allowed the defendants to be released to Father O'Loughlin under their own recognizance. In doing so, the court opened up the possibilities of Indiantown, Florida becoming a safe haven for the Maya people. Following the trial of 1983, the Indian Law Resource Center in Washington D.C. was contacted in order to create a "Committee of Maya Refugees" (*Comité de Refugiados Mayas*) in Indiantown, Florida, and with the aid of Shelton Davis, along with Jeronimo Camposeco and Father Frank O'Loughlin, the Corn Maya Project was initiated with the philosophy of bringing together Maya indigenous culture, identity, and values. The Corn Maya project therefore became a central instrument in integrating Maya people to the United States in finding them housing, employment, and refuge.

## **PREVENTING A CHIMALTENANGO MASSACRE AND RECOLLECTIVE AGENCY**

During the early 1980s, some of the worst recorded massacres took place in Guatemala against the Maya Indians. According to Loucky and Moors (2000:3), "some 440 villages by the army's own count, 626 according to the *Comisión de Esclarecimiento Histórico* statistics (CEH 1999), were totally destroyed. Maya as a group were identified by the army as insurgent allies and targeted for elimination without regard to their civilian status." As another author remarks:

in Guatemala, the 1981-1982 genocide was surgically precise. Military analysts marked communities and regions according to colors. White spared those communities thought to have no rebel influence. Pink identified areas in which the insurgency had limited presence; suspected guerrillas and their supporters were to be killed but the communities left standing. Red gave no quarter; all were to be executed and villages razed.

(Grandin 2000:188-189; Linstroth 2009:144)

Given this atmosphere of military massacres in Guatemala, the following story about Shelton Davis is all the more remarkable for the foresight Davis had in helping to save a village of Kaqchikel Mayas in the Department of Chimaltenango in 1982. In parallel circumstances, Linda Green elaborates about the Kaqchikel Mayas of Xe'caj: "how does one become socialized to terror? Does it imply conformity or acquiescence to the status quo? While it is true that with repetitiveness and familiarity, people learn to accommodate themselves to terror and fear, low intensity panic remains in the shadow of waking consciousness" (Green 2004:186). Indeed, how does one prevent such terror campaigns from

happening in Guatemala? As José Barreiro tells it, the ensuing story about Shelton Davis demonstrates that he had the fortitude and the contacts to save many lives and prevent another massacre in Guatemala.

**JPL:** So you knew Sandy how, and maybe tell me more about that?

**JB:** Well, at one time from 1976 to 1984, I was an Associate Editor of the national Indian newspaper, *Akwasne Notes*...And I think it would have been around '78 that I first met Sandy Davis, because of the early work that he was doing with the then editor of the newspaper John Mohawk, Seneca, native man, he was a well known intellectual, John died a couple of years ago himself. And I remember one incident I did actually work with Sandy. I was running an emergency response network for human rights issues relative to native people and of course this would have been more toward 1982, there was a case, a very interesting case of a...Well, you know there was also major human rights violations in Central America, especially Guatemala with the massacres that were going on, hundreds of massacres that took place. But there was one case in Chimaltenango that involved a community of about 4,000 or 5,000 people displaced by an army sweep in their area, and the folks [Kaqchikel Mayas] had taken to the mountains, and to the woods, the forests and hiding. Sandy somehow became aware, or got information that the folks, that the army was surrounding these people, and were moving in artillery and, what had looked like was going to occur, was really a major massacre of these folks [Kaqchikel Mayas], and they were being accused of being guerrillas. So we were on the phone with Sandy quite a bit about it. He was very concerned about it. And he wanted us to activate our network, which essentially at the time prior to computers was a phone tree that involved about several hundred people that were willing to respond to alerts from the newspaper relative to these kinds of cases. Well, Sandy Davis was somehow able to obtain the name of the colonel that was running the army operation and not only that, he was able to receive the two phone numbers, if I remember correctly, of the army base where they were stationed.

**JPL:** Really?

**JB:** Yes, yes, it is an amazing story really. I have never written it, but I have spoken about it at one of the events here after his death. But he was able to receive this information. Of course, also with good advice about the kind of message that we wanted to pass on, which was essentially well, of course, let these folks know that there was a lot of attention to this issue, and we alerted the phone tree, folks began to make phone calls and send telegrams, basically asking what was going on, that they were aware of the situation, and that they were concerned that these people might be mistaken for guerrillas by the army. Nothing was ever said against the Guatemalan army, just straightforward information. And it created quite a stir, and we came to understand later the army pulled back its position, and allowed these folks to come off the mountain, and rejoin their villages. And then the army put out a statement that it had rescued these folks from the guerrillas, the EGP, *El Ejército Guerrillero de Los Pobres*, which was an amazing thing, I have never forgotten that. Because to me, Sandy was the epitome of a scholar activist, a person who did fantastic scholarship, you know always attentive to the truth, and to what was documentable and verifiable, but always with an eye to doing what he could to safeguard the conditions and you know the safety, the life, and limb of native people, in this case, I don't know how he was able to get the information he did, but I'll never forget how his agency in this case literally saved, I would say hundreds if not thousands of lives because things were very hot at that moment, I don't know if you remember that time but 1982 was just, just horrendous, the open season on Maya. So to me, this was the best incident, you know, I can tell of his involvement, just his ability to do things. I don't think he ever talked about it much. We talked about it some afterwards between ourselves but he was not one to take credit for much. So that was the incident I always would like to recall about Sandy.

**JPL:** Well, suggest going back, so he got these numbers from, I mean, how did he do that?

**JB:** I don't know, I never really found out except that he had pretty good contacts with the native currents...so, he just had some serious contacts. He knew people in government. There were always people kind of willing to help out to people they trusted, so in his network, he was able to figure out the command post for this army operation and actually get the name of the colonel in charge. So imagine, this colonel, I forget, I think it was Martinez was his last name, Colonel Martinez began to get phone calls from all over the United States wondering what was going on, asking for information, and it just threw a real monkey wrench on the operation and so they didn't do it. So that's that. [T]here is certainly a generation of Mayan people who would not be walking around today in that area, if it was not for Sandy Davis. I have no doubt they would have been very seriously attacked and massacred otherwise.

As Jose Barreiro recalls how Shelton Davis acquired the phone numbers of a colonel and army base in Chimaltenango, amazingly a military operation halted for a brief moment during that genocidal period because of a phone tree of callers from the United States enquiring about happenings in Guatemala. There is no doubt of the Guatemalan military's intentions at the time was to spread paralyzing fear but also to maim and destroy Mayan Indians and raze whole villages. As Green points out, the Guatemalan

army strategy began with selective repression against community leaders, not only to garner information, but also to spread fear. The second phase of the counterinsurgency plan included cutting off rural areas from the city. This began with sweeping operations that fanned out from the city, first westward to the department of Chimaltenango, and then south to Quiche, and later further north and westward. The massacres and brutality seemed to occur to some deliberate plan, despite the disorder and panic they provoked: while some villages were left unscathed, others were completely razed. (Green 2004:192)

Amidst such violence, Shelton Davis was able to prevent a likely massacre from occurring by his efforts with Barreiro's phone tree members in the United States. There are few comparable examples whereby the anthropologist is so heroic and selfless as to aid victims in such wartime chaos and tumult.

## CONCLUSIONS

It may be concluded that Shelton Davis, as an engaged anthropologist, had an understanding of his "shareable relation to the world" (Dresch and James 2000:5). This was especially true by the manner in which Davis aided Mayan immigrant populations and the Mayas in Guatemala. The narratives about Shelton Davis' engagement with the Mayas demonstrate a commitment to humanitarian efforts whereby people may benefit from the good works of a scholar rather than simply being subject to scholarship. To understand the activism of an anthropologist during a specific time frame such as Shelton Davis and his contributions with the Mayas during the 1980s, means examining the multifaceted formulations of narration, and specifically in this essay from three close colleagues: Camposeco, O'Loughlin, and Barreiro. Their narratives not only express Davis' lifetime

commitment to indigenous people and the Mayas but also equally allude to the overall problems of immigration in the United States. These narratives about the work of Shelton Davis in association with Maya immigrants, and the Mayas in Guatemala, especially the Kanjobal Mayas, represent the world as it was known then in the 1980s, during the Cold War, and how to protect innocent lives, whether Maya refugees in Florida or Mayas fleeing from the Guatemalan army in Chimaltenango. Expressing this “pastness” not only alludes to a period in time, but also to the conditions of these happenings with the central focus being a life of an anthropologist and his endeavors to make better the lives of Maya people.

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## NOTES

1 My own acquaintance with Sandy (Shelton) Davis was very brief. I knew him the last two years of his life. I first met him in the spring of 2008 along with José Barreiro at the Guatemalan-Maya Center in Lake Worth, Florida. Subsequently, we remained in contact over the telephone and via email. He was very interested in my article about Kanjobal Mayan immigrants, and following this, my work among urban Amerindians in Brazil for a Fulbright Award. To capture the influence of Sandy Davis on the Mayan people and his anthropology of the Maya, I decided to interview colleagues who had years of contact with Davis and rely upon their memories of him for a complete picture of Davis in the 1980s.

2 Jeronimo Camposeco is 72 years old, and former Director of the Corn Maya, Inc. He is a Jacaltec Maya and has years of experience as interpreter and activist with the Mayan people of South Florida. Father Frank O’Loughlin, 69 years old, is a Diocesan priest and was ordained when he was twenty-three years old in Ireland. Dr. Jose Barreiro, 62 years old, is Taino Indian by descent from Cuba and is a writer, journalist, professor, and Assistant Director of Research at the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) at the Smithsonian Institution. Dr. Barreiro was founding editor of *Native Americas Journal*, the flagship publication of Akwe:kon Press at Cornell University’s American Indian Program.

3 According to María Cristina García (2005:162):

“From June 1983 to September 1990, not more than 3% of Salvadoran and Guatemalan asylum applications were successful (2.6% for Salvadorans and 1.86% for Guatemalans). The Nicaraguans had a slightly higher acceptance rate, although not as high as generally assumed: 25.2 percent during the period 1983-1990. (Asylees from the USSR, by comparison, had an asylum rate of 76.7% and Cubans a 17.2% approval rate.)”

4 The United States Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) was dissolved in 2003 with a previous jurisdiction under the United States Department of Justice. It is now known as the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) under the United States Department of Homeland Security.

5 It is interesting to note that Father O'Loughlin has made the acquaintance of, and worked with many anthropologists over the years aside from Shelton Davis and myself. Importantly, he worked with the anthropologist Allan Burns in Indiantown. Jeronimo Camposeco was also instrumental in aiding Allan Burns as well.

6 Both Peter Upton and Rob Williams were immigration defense lawyers during the 1980s. At the time Peter Upton worked as a lawyer for the American Friends Service Committee of Miami, Florida and Rob Williams worked for the Florida Rural Legal Services of Immokalee, Florida.

7 The Bill Woods Project affected many indigenous people in the Guatemalan highlands. The nine Kanjobal defendants were part of the Bill Woods Project. This was significant as Bill Woods was an activist priest and helped Maya Indians colonize and settle remote areas of Guatemala until his untimely death. According to Manz (2004:87):

“The military terror was also targeted at priests. Father William (Guillermo) Woods, from the Maryknoll order, who had organized the settlement of peasants in the western part of the rain forest in the late 1960s, was the first victim. On November 20, 1976, his small plane went down on a return trip to the Ixcán, in an accident that was widely attributed to the military. It was the first time a priest in the Ixcán, in fact in all of Guatemala, had been killed.”

Both Jeronimo Camposeco and Father O'Loughlin explain the significance of the Bill Woods Project:

**JC:** He founded a co-op. He got the money, some organization gave him money. He [Father William Woods] bought lands for the people near Huehuetenango in the lowlands called Ixcán. He brought all the people who are without lands to live there. And they started producing coffee and other products in the lowlands that are very productive. In that way he started helping the people. But the army did not like that...Of course, it was difficult to go into those farms because there was no way to go, there was no roads, so he was flying a plane, his own plane, and so the army just shot him down. The news says it was an accident but it wasn't.

**FFL:** Three people were with him [Bill Woods] on the day, right. Three people were with him [Bill Woods] on the day in the thing, and they all lost their lives. The reason that it is believed that there is a case that Bill Woods was shot down, is because the head of the Guatemalan air force at the time was up in the area where he never goes, and so on. And obviously had a project and that was Bill Woods, you can actually Google Bill Woods still...

8 *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* or *Comunidades de Base* were small and self-directed groups of Mayas who studied the Bible and applied its teachings to everyday life. The new Liberation Theology and Vatican II Teachings inspired such communities in Guatemala.

9 The co-ops that Father O'Loughlin speaks about are the communities established by Father William Woods (aka Bill Woods). As Beatriz Manz (2004:19-20) maintains:

“Instead, colonization of remote regions of the country became an alternative and then a goal for the Catholic Church and peasant colonizers...The Catholic Church itself became a heretofore unimagined target. The first priest killed in Guatemala was a Texan named William Woods (Father Guillermo), who was involved in the Ixcán colonization. His imposing physical presence, manner, temperament, and, above all, his irreverence for the military brought him unwanted attention. (In today's parlance he would be called 'a gringo with an attitude.')

He is described in the Maryknoll magazine as someone whose 'ideas were as big as his heart,' a hazard in Guatemala. The army viewed with suspicion his comings and goings; he piloted his own small plane, and they perceived his

independent streak as arrogance and defiance. He died in a suspicious plane crash on November 20, 1976, at the age of forty-five.”

10 Barreiro is not aware, or does not remember how long Jeronimo Camposeco knew Davis, and that that relationship extended to Davis’ Ph.D. fieldwork days in the 1960s in Guatemala.

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