

Shelton H. Davis Interview 4/21/03 Washington, D.C.

Jim: How did Indigena get founded.

Shelton: I did my doctoral dissertation in Guatemala in 1967-69 and my thesis adviser who was David Maybury-Lewis at Harvard University invited me to Brazil and I went to Brazil, wrote my dissertation on Guatemala on a small Mayan Indian villages [living in Copacabana] sitting in my bathing suit and I taught at the Museu Nacional. The Museu Nacional began a graduate program in education and it was the first generation of that program.

Maybury-Lewis was in Rio at the time. Roberto Cardoso was at the Museu Nacional running this program with David Maybury-Lewis and they established this major program. A couple of interesting things about it. One, it was very clear that many of the students were sociologists and not necessarily anthropologists during the military dictatorship including some who came from São Paulo. It was looked at that the National Museu was where people studied strange customs and bizarre strange peoples and because it had such a history it wasn't associated with the radical student movement of 1968. They were a number of sociologists there. There were interested in poverty in the Northeast and agrarian issues in the Northeast and beginning to work in urban favelas as well.

Jim: So you had done your field work in Guatemala and then went to Brazil.

Shelton: I wrote my thesis the first year and then taught at the Museu Nacional the second, so I got to know the Brazilians well. There was a group of foreign anthropologists that were coming from Oxford in England and also from the U.S., Columbia University was sending anthropologists and others, Cornell, Wagley, but also people coming from France who were students of Levi-Strauss. Most of the anthropology was linked to structuralism. It really didn't look at public policy issues. And when I was at the Museu Nacional in my second year a physician came by the museum named Noel Nutels. Noel was a very well known medical physician who worked with the Villas-Boas brothers and also was very close to Darci Ribeiro in health programs for indigenous peoples in the Amazon region. He was a physician who provided a lot of the health assistance for the Xingu Park when it was being established. And he was very concerned that anthropologists weren't speaking up when the Transamazon Highway, because in 1970, I was still there in 1970, they began to announce the Transamazon Highway. Noel was the person, I met with Noel on several occasions, and he made it clear that something would have to be done internationally because the situation wasn't ripe at that time, because it was very different for Brazilian academics and intellectuals to speak out at all because of the dictatorship.

Jim: Nutels, Brazilian?

Shelly: Yes, he was very close to a group of people who in the 1950s and early 1960s were very active with indigenous policy in helping to create the Xingu Indian Park. They

were all very critical when the SPI, the Indian Protection Service, becoming corrupted, collaborating with the destruction of the indigenous groups and he was also very critical when the military took over the FUNAI in the late 1960s. He was still a physician, an older man at the time and he was the one who convinced me that we had to do something, something externally about what was doing in Brazil.

I went back to the U.S. after two very good years in Brazil teaching there. David Maybury-Lewis had invited me to come to teach at Harvard for a couple of years. At that time at Harvard, it was very interesting, the first summer that I was there, there was a close friend of mine who had done research in the Xingu Park. He was there during the summers and his name was Patrick Menget who was doing field work in the Xingu Park. He and I in the summer of 70 or 71 doing research on Brazilian indigenous policy in order to begin internationally to bring international attention on Brazilian Indian policy. The French were very active. Lucien Bodard had written a book about the whole SPI scandal but in the U.S. there wasn't much focus on it. And Patrick and I did a lot of research. These were materials that were available at Harvard at the library there. The early history of the SPI. We wrote an article entitled "Custer is alive and lives in Brazil." It was published in a magazine called the Indian Historian in San Francisco. At that time it was a real ? looking at the history from the old Rondon position to the new military focusing on this development policy. And at that point the American Indians were very active in the U.S. I was teaching a course at Harvard on American Indians in the United States and Wounded Knee occurred at that time period 1971-73. In 72 or 73 I got contacted by a Haitian woman named Marie-Helene Laraque. She was Haitian and had become very concerned about her own history in the Caribbean, of the relationship between the Caribs and the Arawaks in the Caribbean, became very close with the American Indian Movement. Her father taught in New York Comparative Literature. She had gone to the Stockholm Conference in 1972 on the environment. And there were a group of people at the Conference that brought up about the indigenous issues in lowland South America. She called me up because she had known about this work I had written in the Indian Historian and asked me if I would cooperate with her in setting up this organization called Indigena in Berkeley. In 73 my contract had ended. (There's a whole thing going on at Harvard. We had a critical anthropology group; radical anthropologists we were taking over a building. They kind of purged some of the anthropologists, some of the economists. I left Harvard. My appointment wasn't continued.

I went out and spent (I went back to Guatemala the summer before) and spent two years 73-75 in Berkeley helping to establish this organization called Indigena. I taught part time at U.C. Davis at Oakland Community College in order to get some money to survive. It was an NGO before they called them that. We were UNITAS house, right next to NICH. NACLA became very interested in the indigenous issues in Latin America for the first time because, you know at that period in the early 70s the Barbados group also emerged. These were a group of Latin American anthropologists of which Darcy Ribeiro was one, and Guilherme Bonfim Batalla was a great Mexican anthropologists and they met in Barbados under the sponsorship of the World Council of Churches and published a major book on interethnic relations in lowland South America which denounced what was going on in terms of displacement and genocide of indigenous groups. Also at that time,

in Scandinavia, the International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs began. In England, Cultural Survival began. NACLA became somewhat concerned at that time for indigenous issues. First became concerned about Guatemala and did a report on Guatemala that included a section on the indigenous issue and there was this great debate going on in Guatemala between the hard-core Marxists in the beginning and the first focusing on the ethnic issue so this class vs. ethnicity became a concern in the 70s. But it was raised as an issue in this issue on Guatemala, and then American Friends of Brazil, Niva, Paul. I got to know them really well and Indigena contributed a regular article, and that enabled me to do research in NACLA on some of the political economy of the Amazon.

Jim: You would use NACLA resources to research and write articles for the Brazilian Information on Brazil which was the basis for the book.

Shelton: Because they had an enormous amount of data. We were able to get information from the business journals and follow U.S. policy in Guatemala. We started to focus on corporations. Anthropologists started to get in touch with us, especially foreign anthropologists. I was very close to Ken Brecher of Oxford who did research on the Xingu as well. Ken went back to write his thesis at Oxford and Christopher Hampton became his good friend. Christopher through Ken had heard about Brazilian Indians and Ken assisted him in writing *Savages*.

Jim: In interviews Christopher says he saw a 1969 London Times article called genocide which inspired him.

Shelton: I remember that article. It is a great article. Ken helped him in putting things together with Christopher. That was Ken Brecher. He left Oxford. He worked for Gordon Davidson. Christopher and Gordon worked together with Ken. Davidson was the person at the Mark Taper Forum in publicizing this and even I went down. Niva put a mask on. Gordon Davis was very much into Social Theater, socially responsive theater. He would have speakers after each play. Niva was there with a mask. And it was very impressive. He had a mask on.

After the play which was about a revolutionary and the whole argument of Marxism versus ethnicity; the proletariat versus these traditional cultures.

It was more trying to get dramatic. American Indians were in the play. Hired. They learned Brazilian Indian dancing. There was a great Alaskan native Indian woman who was there. She became an actress.

Jim: What was your impression of the impact of *Victims of the Miracle* and *Indigena*?

Shelton: The other part of this is that I got to know Laura Nader when I was out there and Laura put us in touch with Ralph. We had a meeting here in 1974 with American Friends of Brazil, Nader's organization, and Indigena at Brookings Institute. We published a report called *Supisauya* and there was a whole chart on corporations and Ralph got really

interested in this. We did this at Brookings and U.S. Steel was on the Board of Brookings and they protested it a couple of days before it was on. We held a big conference here in Washington with Nader speaking and it was a whole deal of looking at U.S. corporations. He became very active with helping us on that. We looked to drama/theater community, to Native Americans, to NACLA and more leftwing anti-imperialism groups, and we looked at Nader. And he provided us with a lot of support for this campaign for about ten years.

Jim: If you look at the Alternative Press you can plot a wealth of material about Indigenous people...[analysis by Jim]

Shelton: By the late 70s when you get closer to the abertura you get Consejo Missionero Indigena they were very active. The Catholic Church, Tomas Balderino, was the the Bishop of São Félix in Goiás and he was very active with the progressive church in the Amazon and they started a group called CMI which was a church group. Then there were the Comissão pro-Indio. São Paulo had the first one. And they brought lawyers in Djalma Dalari. We started to get active with CIMI and São Paulo. The third element; you have the anthropologists, you have the Church, in the late 1970s is the Yanamomi campaign for the Park. Claudia Araújo who was a topographer who lived with the Yanamomi and she began to organize a campaign and they got people like Carlos Drummond de Andrade and Brazilian artists and poets behind them. Darci was coming back to Brazil at that time. So you have this campaign for the Yanamomi. And because the Yanamomi had so much attention in the U.S. because every student read about the Yanamomi. You started to get a Brazilian network pro-indio indigenous rights. And that was very important in the abertura.

Jim: Impact of *Victims of the Miracle*?

Shelton: Good reaction among students. It went through six printings paperback edition used in courses. One or two anthropologists were against it being published because I didn't do field work in Brazil. I did field work in Guatemala. Because I was looking at political economy at the same time, getting this data that was going on. Cambridge had to send the book to two people to make a decision on it because one was at Cambridge university and had done work on Columbia, he was wonderful and he gave it a good review. Fernando Henrique Cardoso was visiting at Princeton at the time and he wrote a very good review of the book, so it was a combination of Fernando Henrique and the other person who gave it good reviews. Then it was translated by Zahar in Brazil and I dedicated the translation to Noel because he was so important; he was a real figure. The one thing that became a contentious issue in the book, I guess, as it emerged in Brazil, especially in the late 1980s was, not the book itself, but the whole interpretation of the Villas Boas Brothers. I was very positive. I had felt that they had created something. You know it was the first indigenous park ever created in the world, maybe, it is called the Parque Indigena Xingu. They really had this idea that they could create a place where indigenous people could survive following their indigenous ways. They kept missionaries out. People argued that it was very paternalistic and provided an image for the Brazilian government that it was doing something. I think that was unfair. I think the Villas Boas

brothers were always critical. I think they were a product of the 40s and 50s and a product of São Paulo and a lot of what they did was nationalism, and romanticism about the indigenous people, they like all of us were products of history and place, but there was a little bit of criticism of the Villas-Boas brothers.

Jim: [About the Villas Boas brothers]

Shelton: Part of that is about the Krinacacori Indians. Giant Indians of Brazil. ... These are people that the Villas Boas brothers pacified, they called it pacifying, then they brought them into the Xingu, went and got a court case and went home. Film, "The Tribe that hides from man". I once wrote an article called the tribe that hides from genocide. Irwin Louis Horowitz wrote a review of my book in the nation at the time and he knocked me for using this term genocide.

Jim: How do you assess that?

Shelton: I understand what he is saying. There is something different a policy like the Nazi's to exterminate a group and a set of development issues.

Jim: You could say that the U.S. army had a policy of near genocide against the Indians in this country.

Shelton: That's true, that's true. I think that was true in the nineteenth century. I think that the Brazilian government had enough information so that they could have done this differently.

Jim: So the term is applicable to Brazil.

Shelton: I'm not sure. I have to think it through. There was another book that was being reviewed at the time that was called genocide in Paraguay by Richard Arons. He reviewed both books. I think it's a good question. I think there was enough known, especially on the health impacts of the encounter and protecting indigenous land. They were driven by economics, rather than social concerns. They were thoroughly driven by economics as the [World] Bank was at that time in the 70s and 80s.

Jim: How did you get involved in Guatemala?

Shelton: That was part of my dissertation.

Jim: Why Latin America.

Shelton: When I was a graduate student at Harvard they had a Maya seminar.

Jim: And you fell in love.

Shelton: There was a professor there, Monroe Edmondson suggested that I go to Guatemala. I learned Spanish in high school and college and visited Mexico when I graduated from college.

Jim: Moment that was exhilarating.

Shelton: For me the most important thing was that I felt that I was really doing this with Brazilian colleagues. I wasn't just doing this on my own. I felt that I was given so much in Brazil that this was reciprocity. The other thing that I think was important is that it did open the international issue with Native Americans in the U.S. I think as North Americans we face a very similar problem as Brazilians that is about our own identities. Part of our identities in the U.S. are defined by our relations to these indigenous groups. I think you can't understand American history without understanding its relations to Afro-americans and indigenous. I think the same thing in Brazil which our historians have told us, you can't understand Brazil without its relationship to its Afro and indigenous populations, just like its immigrant historians. I felt that two of the major things, especially when we were working with American friends of Brazil and also in the Pro-Indian Commission, the Yanomami Commission, CIMI, there was a real sense of solidarity with those people and I felt that I was really respected by them as a North American writing about that. Cause I was in solidarity with them on this issue. At the same time we worked very closely with Akwesasne Notes on the Iroquois Reservation. We worked closely with them. When we worked on the Yanomami campaign we worked with Robin Wright who went to Stanford and he worked with us. He is now in Campinas, married to a Brazilian with children.

And there were some wonderful U.S. academics, Ralph Della Cava. Working with Ralph on those kinds of issues was wonderful. Paul Silberstein who was a peace corps volunteer and came back from Brazil and was interested. There were some wonderful people.

Charles Wagley was very supportive of this when my book came out.

There was enormous change with abertura and democratization. Indigenous organizations organized themselves.

What happened to the Indigena group archive?

I sent a lot of my archives to ISA. Instituto Socio-Ambiental. They're in Sao Paulo and they're also in Brasilia. The person who would know about it is Carlos Alberto Ricardo.

Jim: Material connected to *Victims of the Material*. Most of my Brazil material I sent to them.

Publish *Povos Indigenas do Brasil*.

Centro Eucumenico de Documentação e Informação and Niva went back to that. I went to Cambridge and started the Anthropology Resource Center in 1975 (ARC) lasted until 1984 then we went broke. . .

Shelton: There was a recession going on. Hard to keep NGOs financed. We connected a lot with the environmental movement. Robert Goodland called me here to do consultation. He wrote a book called *Green Hell to Red Dessert*. He and I went together. I wasn't at the bank; I was at ARC. He taught in Brasilia and grew up in Guyana and an ecologist at the New York Botanical Garden and he was the first tropical ecologist at the World Bank in the 80s, and we went in the 70s to the Ford Foundation. He wrote an op-ed in the *Times* called "Paving the Brazilian Amazon" and said they were turning it into a parking lot. We went to the Ford Foundation and said, you know this issue of environmental destruction, deforestation; he even mentioned global climate change that nobody had heard of. I mentioned the indigenous and they said, it's not really an issue; poverty is the issue that was in the late 70s. He started the same environmental unit here. He's retired. He was the first person to raise the indigenous and the environmental question. He had a chapter of his book. And I picked that up in the last chapter of the *Victims* book was the environment. That was a great debate about politics and the environment. We had a great debate with the people I worked with at ARC about the indigenous and the environment.

Holland, Peter. "The Director Intervenes; Christopher Hampton's *Savages*." *Comparative Drama*. 13:2 (1979): 142-49.

Material for Section on the Indians

- "Custar is Alive and Lives in Brazil," *Indian Historian* by Shelton Davis and Patrick Menget.
- Holland, Peter. "The Director Intervenes; Christopher Hampton's *Savages*." *Comparative Drama*. 13:2 (1979): 142-49.
- Review of *Victims of the Miracle* (including *Nation*)
- *Indigena* or all of the articles about the indigenous in BIB
- Gordon Davidson formerly of Mark Taper
- Mark Taper archives
- Ken Brecher at Sundance; (310-360-1981) Judith Wexler is assistant

