

From "The Guardian":

The chases were terrific. I rooted for the good guy, Jaguar Paw, and his struggle to find his lost family. I lapped up the portents of evil and, bloody as the film was, cheered when the bad guys got what they deserved. But if *Apocalypto* is supposed to bear some relationship to Maya civilisation, then I have to hate it. It conflates 2,000 years of Maya history into a single period the equivalent, in British history, of setting one story in a time stretching from the Roman occupation to the death of Elizabeth I, disregarding changes in language, religion, and culture.

Jaguar Paw's village is perplexing. The houses look like cages. There is no evidence of farming, weaving or maize-processing, and it is implied that they were completely isolated, knowing nothing of Maya cities. In real life, the Maya were farmers from at least 2,000BC. They built stout houses on platforms faced with well-cut stone. Kitchen gardens contained vegetables, herbs and dyes. Men farmed plots and grew maize, beans, squash and cacao. I suspect Mel Gibson wanted to show the rural Maya as noble savages, which would make them fair game for Christian conversion.

Elite warriors are shown attacking Jaguar Paw's village for sacrificial victims. This is rubbish: Sacrifices would be prisoners of war from conflicts between nobles, not innocent villagers. Their rules of war did not sanction killing in battle: the victor was supposed to capture his opponent, and the captive was then taken to the captor's city, and death came later, in the temple. Death was not inevitable, though. Negotiation could result in release.

At the end of *Apocalypto*, the Spaniards arrive and the film closes with the idea of a new beginning for the humble forest-dwelling Maya. This is hard for me to swallow. The Spanish who conquered the Maya in Belize, where I am now working, used dogs of war trained to eat human flesh. The soldiers cut off ears, noses and hands. They plundered villages and raped survivors. Such was the new beginning. Gibson's film, to me, is simply the latest in a long line of justifications for European displacement of Amerindian peoples.

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