

>>Professor Anthony Grubbs: Professor Myers is a specialist in colonial Mexico especially under the writers of nuns of convent literature, nuns and other female authors. She has written four books and numerous articles. She has been awarded grants from the NEH, The Lilly Foundation, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas and many more. All of these have funded her research and various projects. The exhibit today shares the name with her most recent book which is in press with University of Arizona now. It will be coming out soon. The book itself has exclusive photos and various interviews that she was able to do along the way as she followed the course which we see right here [points to screen]. That will be coming out soon from the University of Arizona Press. That being said I don't want to take up any more time either because we have a lot to see and hear from Professor Myers so it is my pleasure to present her and welcome her to Michigan State University. Thank you. [applause]

>>Professor Kate Meyers: Thank you all for coming to the talk. Lots of people standing, there are lots of chairs, a couple seats here, if you're fine standing, that's okay, there are chairs in the hall, perhaps we could bring some in. Now that everyone is sitting and comfortable, I want to start with a big thank you to you all. I know how much work is to bringing exhibit to campus, to get funding together, to mobilize people and particularly to mobilize an academic community at this time of year. We always think we have so much time in an academic year and then you come back after break and it is all very condense. So thank you very much for taking time out of the busy schedule and special thanks to CLACS, RCS, my former student Tony and the people who made this possible, the Dean's office and the many students who have shown interest in this topic already. I asked Rocio if she would like this to be formal or more informal, as we say in Spanish, a charla. So this is going to be a charla, it would be very informal, so at any point that you'd like to ask questions, feel free to ask a question, if something's not clear raise your hand, Rocio can be my time keeper so we have time for other people's comments and questions.

One of the things Rocio suggested might be of interest is how does someone go about starting a project like this? I started out as a history major, I liked history because it was a way to understand the past, which it fascinated me. And then I went to Spain for my junior year and got interested in things Spanish and then I went on to grad school mostly because I interviewed for other jobs and I didn't want to be a banker. I didn't want to be a social worker. I liked to study. I always had this idea that people who wrote books always knew what they wanted to do and that just wasn't me I just kind of followed one foot after another. So I got to graduate school and was going to work on visual images of the conquest. Because the conquest interested me a lot and I got to a rare book library and found a nun's manuscript she was writing her spiritual autobiography in the 17th century. It had never been published. People knew of the manuscript but thought it had been lost and this 12 volume manuscript was in the John Carter Brown Library and I kept working on my dissertation but I kept sneaking back and reading a little more of the diary a little bit more and I finally decided I should just do my dissertation topic because this seems like fun then it seems like this would be a good idea to your dissertation on a fun topic. I spent quite a few years working on archival documents. She was in colonial Mexico. She talks quite a bit about family life in 17th century from a normal woman's point of view. She was not a Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, she wrote in very colloquial language. That was my first career in academia. She founded a convent first in Puebla and then in Oaxaca, Mexico. And

so as I was doing archival research and because these were still functioning convents. Everyone would talk to me about the conquest. I'd take a taxi someplace and the taxi drivers would start talking to me about conquest of Mexico. I'd go have lunch some place and someone would start talking to me about the conquest of Mexico. After years and years of this and once I was getting promoted and finally got to the point where I had academic freedom, I'm just going to work on talking to Mexicans about the conquest and that's going to be my book project. I have this intuition and often that's just what we do is follow an intuition. I felt like this was an important topic but I didn't know why, being a gringita from the Midwest, had no Hispanic background, fascinated by the culture but very much coming at this as an outsider to the material but as someone who could appreciate it. And so, I began with a small grant and I thought that I'll just follow Cortes' route of conquest from Veracruz and you can see this is kind of a composite map and he goes through what was called Tlaxcala, and Cholula, and Puebla, Central Mexico, and then on to what was then Tenochtitlan, what is today Mexico City. And then, I'd just take buses and taxis and I just had a little microphone and actually, our youngest was just 6 months, so she was strapped on to me and went with a photographer just to see if I had a project because first you have to test pilot something and I was amazed that people wanted to talk. Everyone wanted to talk. I fully expected some people to say, "you know, you're American, this is our history" or "No, please don't record me, don't take my picture" but instead they invited me to their homes they wanted to take me to other people to talk about. They wanted me to get in their cars to take me to another historical site to tell me more of the story. I figured I'm interested in this and I'm learning a lot so this is a good project. That photographer unfortunately, got Crone's Disease, and couldn't continue on the project. So, I contracted another photographer for my second trip. We got funding from the Lilly Foundation. He's a former photographer from National Geographic, Steve Raymer. Those are the photographs out on exhibit here. So he travelled along with me along this route. Then, were 4 more trips for interviews and my basic point of departure is what they call this Ruta de Cortes, Ruta de la Conquista is not only historical, geographical route but also a symbolic route about culture, identification, identity, or how you want to use that term, it's changing these days, how people talk about their past because what I found as I started to talk to people and started to look at this images, it is that history is both a national project for creating a Mexican identity but it is also very much a personal project that people recount the conquest story according to what their personal identification is. Their personal identification is highly dependent on ethnicity, tradition, and what part of this conquest route they live in. [Goes to map of the route of Cortes on screen and points] For those of you who aren't real familiar with the conquest, Cortes starts in Veracruz and moves up to Xantuala, the center of the Teotihuacan civilization. They basically ally with him, provide him food and carriers. He continues on to Tlaxcala. He has an encounter with the Tlaxantecas that were not friendly with the Aztec civilization. After a couple of squirmishes they become his allies and that's really why he was able to finally win Tenochtitlan because he had thousands and thousands of allies. With the Tlaxantecas they go to Cholula which was the spiritual center of Mesoamerica. Terrible massacre takes place there of all the spiritual leaders and then they move on to Mexico Tenochtitlan. They're invited into the city and then they're expelled. And then Cortes retakes the city by putting it under siege for 30 days. There are lots more details within that picture but that becomes important with this historical-geographical route becomes the center point for how I interview people. So I interview people in Veracruz--

there three places -- Tlaxcala, Cholula and then also the Spanish city Puebla, and the Center Tenochtitlan. So within this symbolic route, trope, I use a four-point methodology. [Returns to podium] One, I go back to historical sources about the conquest and even historical sources are in great conflict with each other. What Cortes and Bernal Diaz say is very different from what Alva Ixtlilxochitl or Bernardino de Sagahun say about the conquest. It depends very much on the ethnicity, whether they allied with the Spaniards or did not ally with the Spaniards. So that's one source I used. Another source is what I call popular or cultural materials. I started looking at comics, murals, theater, movies, novels, ballads because if you go to Mexico, images of the conquest are everywhere, whether in songs, whether images of Malinche, Cortes, whether on the walls of the National Palace. So these images whether verbal or visual constantly are reinterpreting and retelling the story of the conquest in different ways. And people are acculturated to that. In with those popular materials, I also studied the state-wide mandatory textbooks published by la Secretaria de Educacion Publica because they are school children's first formal context or engagement with the conquest narrative. So that was my second source. The third source is what I call the living archive. So, I interviewed over 100 people in every interview I posed the same four basic questions:

What do you think of Cortes and the conquest?

How did you learn about it?

Do you think there is evidence of the conquest today?

And the most interesting tended to be What else I should know for my book? And it was that last question where I got my best material. What do you think I should know as an outsider? And that's where they would say, "Oh, I want to take you to this place." "Oh, you need to talk to this person." And that's also when they left the official story of maybe what they learned in school and gave me a story that was highly personalized. So that was the third source. The fourth source was visual images. Contemporary photographs that you'll see in the exhibit today. Images of the codices, some of which is also in the exhibit today and then I sort of expanded out as I started to talking to more and more Mexicans, the diversity of opinions and traditions, the ethnicities, of class difference, was really quite eye-opening to me and here I'd been studying this stuff for years. So I decided to start asking informants if they might send me some of their own photographs. So I got photographs of people's abuelas. In one case it was her abuela that fed Zapata's army and she said that this is important because I think that Mexico really renace with the Revolution and had nothing to do with the Spanish conquest. And I got people and their indigenous communities, playing their traditional music so it adds a much more personal element to the imagery. I also started studying imagery of things like -- there was a national campaign -- I think it was 3 years ago, if you know the marca of cerveza, Indio, and the ad, and the marketing was, "Mas Indio que nunca" And what is that about? because as I started talking to people from these 4 basic questions, two things came out in every interview. One, was this idea that conquest is ongoing. That it's continuing in some form or another, whether it's through the state, or through the elite, the more Spanish population of Mexico, and the part that I didn't anticipate -- a blind spot completely -- was the role of the US. The reasons one of my conclusions is that one of the reasons that conquest is on the tip of everyone's tongue in Mexico

is that they are still dealing with the consequences conquest. You know, one hundred years ago, Mexico was conquered or taken or stolen or whatever word you want to use, by the US and now 1 in 10 Mexicans live in the US. So there's a sense of loss, economic sovereignty now with capitalism, cultural sovereignty because of US influences and businesses, products. So there is this ongoing sense of sort of a different kind of conquest. And there's also on one level this sense on of conquest the national level, that the Mexican government, one guy called it a schizophrenic policy. We have 63 indigenous languages, we're a multi ethnic country, no longer just mestizo, it is recognized that we have all these official ethnicities and languages. But on a practical level many things are not being done to support indigenous communities. Somebody was telling me about her interest in Latin American eco-systems when they come in and want to create a hydro-electric plant and those waters may be considered sacred to those indigenous communities so there's this ongoing economic conquest either by the Mexican state or by international global economy. So that's one of the conclusions that I took away from the project that it's very unlike this idea of conquest in the United States, it's still the reality for many people. And so originally, the book had three parts. Interviews from Veracruz, interviews from the Center, you know Tlaxcala, Puebla, Cholula, and interviews from Mexico DF. I had spent two more years on what do Mexicans living in the US think because everyone talked about el otro lado in the sense that I've got this brother or dad or I was born there but I came back so what is that dynamic relationship between Mexico and the US and how is it seen in part some sort of conquest dynamic. So I started interviewing people living in Indiana, Mexican Americans, as part of a sampling of what some of these ideas are and what is that they're teaching their children about the conquest? If they're raising their children here who are first generation Mexican-Americans, what are they teaching them, what happens to somebody, one of them was an 18-year-old at IU who said the conquest is ongoing. He crossed over illegally as a two-year-old. I had no say in the matter and I've come of age but I can't drive, I can't vote, I have to stay hidden to a certain degree so that became sort of an unexpected outcome of the research project.

So, let's see, I guess I thought as what starts out as this symbolic Ruta de Cortes becomes a site of memory a physical places become ways centers for people to reenact times, history, Conchero Aztec dancers are making a big comeback and number in the tens of thousands now. People are starting to write books about local history. The muralist movement has started up again reinterpreting that through history. Small towns that have never written about their history before are collecting oral histories. They've started an indigenous language literature journal. It's now online through Oxford University. So there's a number of cultural products and artifacts that are coming out of this reinterpretation of history so there's a sense that history really matters, and a focal point has been and continues to be this point of the initial Spanish conquest.

How am I doing on time?

->>Rocio: Oh we're doing fine. If you want to go to the pictures...

>>Man from audience: Before you go to the pictures, I want to go to the theme, did you take a look at or do anything with DNA? You know, when we think about conquest, we also think well, supplant, you're suppressed, you know biologically, did you take a look at that at all?

>>Kate [next to map]: No, I didn't I think my take is more as a historian and what I was more interested in this idea of more self-fashioning, self-identification, it mattered less, really, to me, it seemed in Mexico, in the states {US}, race and heritage have been more biologically defined, or has been linked to this quasi-scientific idea. In Mexico, it seems to be more of what your customs, how do you dress, how do you live, what are your traditions, what are your stories and what I found fascinating is if the dominant discourse after the Revolution is that we're all Mestizos, we're all the same, at an ideological level but at a practical level, no,

->>Man: exactly

>>Kate: ni mucho menos no?

->>Man: Right

But what's interesting is that what used to be great pride, I'm a Mestizo, I am part of the Mexican Nation, is countered, this is over the span of 4 years, the interview. Some of the people who self-identified as Mestizo initially, and one even said, pero Mestizo es como estar en la nada. It's this no man's land. She has just one grandparent who was indigenous, Zapotec. And she now self-identify as indigenous. -I am not mestiza, I am indigenous-. Gustavo Esteva, who is an activist, he helped the Zapatistas and he tells the story about how he was taught, and he is probably in his 70's now, he was taught that his family comes from conquistadores from way back, we're Spanish and they had a house in Mexico City and his grandmother come to visit, she was from Oaxaca, from a Zapotec Village in Oaxaca. She had to come from the back door and he started asking why if we are 100% Spanish background, Do I have this Zapotec speaking grandmother who has to go in the back door with the indigenous service. He says what he had to do with his process of deprofessionalization to unlearn all these western ways. So he can get back to what he wants to be so he now lives in a Zapotec village but he says that does not mean I am Zapotec. You have to tell me who I am but I am deprofessionalized and living in a Zapotec community. So I think that is what interested me more, it is not so much biologically, through DNA, what people were but people were claiming self-identification processes and how those are ongoing and transforming and particularly in a way, one of the things I look a lot it is that Zapatistas uprising in '94 as a parting of the waters.