



TAINO DACA **(I AM)**

"The same way they wrote us
out of history ...
we will write ourselves
back into history"

A FILM BY ALEX ZACARIAS

‘Written out of history,’ Taino write themselves in

Valerie LaRobardier, May 21, 2016, *Poughkeepsie Journal*

“Pummean weeche neen netomp”

Walk with me, my friend (Algonquian)

Emmy award-winning filmmaker Alex Zacarias’ documentary “Taino Daca (I Am)” presents the Taino’s struggle to reaffirm their identity and culture today, despite historians erroneously recording them as extinct more than 400 years ago. Though they were “written out of history” they have found a way to “write themselves back in.”

Under the leadership of people like Kasike (chief) Roberto Mukaro Borrero, the Taino now enjoy a resurgence of a vibrant and robust cultural heritage preserving their spiritual traditions, language and identity over the wide geographic area in which they find themselves today. Borrero is a musician, cultural consultant, human rights activist, U.N. delegate and is recognized as a foremost authority on Taino culture. He will be speaking at the June 4 Intertribal Unity Gathering.

The film received a standing ovation at its advance screening May 15, where it was presented in conjunction with the 15th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, and co-sponsored by the United Confederation of Taino People and the NGO Committee on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a fundraiser for the 2016 East Coast Peace and Dignity Run.

At the heart of the struggle is the survival of indigenous cultures and the importance of associated human rights. But what defines indigenous peoples and what are those rights?

According to Martínez Cobo’s report to the U.N. Subcommission on the Prevention of Discrimination of Minorities (1986), indigenous peoples may be identified as “... those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems.”

The concepts of self-identification and self-determination are not easily understood. One finds it difficult to imagine that a people could be told they no longer exist. And yet it is happening today for many cultures. Taino Kasike Roberto Borrero and Schaghticoke Sachem Hawk Storm in that respect are brothers, and they do view themselves in this way. Both cultures have experienced diaspora and inaccurate historical portrayal, yet both are now experiencing resurgence. This resurgence is one of reaffirming one's culture and identity and gaining a rightful voice to advocate for human rights, peace and dignity, and addressing climate change.

"This is about the right to affirm who we are as indigenous peoples, the original nations of these lands. Our right to self-determination is an inherent human right recognized by the governments who make up the United Nations, including the U.S.," Borrero said.

Storm said, "This is a story that bodes true for so many nations across the world. We call it paper genocide, or writing us into extinction. Schools teach about us in past tense, the federal recognition system is used to pit native against native and abolish self-determination. Until this year they have used blood quantum as a means to determine who is and who isn't native, forcing tribal disenrollment and splitting of families, thus dividing us further. Our lands that we have been moved to have been so destroyed by poisoned water coming in, mining around us and severe encroachment, forcing us to move. All allowing the colonizers to claim we no longer exist. It is time to decolonize, "re-indigenize," and not just talk about self-determination but *be self-determinant*, fully embrace who we are and write ourselves back in. I am Schaghticoke, I am Algonquin! Wanishiik."

Valerie LaRobardier is a professional genealogist, Town of Dover co-historian, member of the Schaghticoke First Nations tribe and serves as the tribal genealogist.

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT THE FILM:

"Beautiful: very informative, inspiring."

"Frustration, Heartbreak & Renewal."

"Very positively impressed!! Hard to distinguish whether my attention was driven by interest in the story, or the way the story was told."

"Love it."

"I'm still learning my roots, I do thank you for opening more doors to our culture."

"Educational, incites hope & pride."

"Very insightful. Grateful that this knowledge is becoming more accessible to youth in this day and age."

"The quality and storyline was insightful, well scripted, and focused."

“Informative, enlightening down to earth portrayal of an important topic.”

“Impactful.”

“Educated and inspired.”

“So awesome to hear about contemporary Taino identity. I feel affirmed in who I am.”

“It was great, I believe young people would enjoy seeing the film.”

“A balanced, fair and important documentary! About time we had something from a Taino in the industry.”

“Excellent info! Profound words of Cacike Mucaro – “If you take out the others we are indigenous to the region. It is important to be close to the land. This is so important!”

“At first pure shock. Then I realized that there are a lot of hidden truths.”

“Amazing I am happy that people want to know where they come from and keep their tradition which is beautiful & educational.”

“It was well produced.”

“Excellent! Your story is the same as ours – the Cabrogal of Danig speaking nations of Australia. It was engaging and interesting.”

“The only way to have change, is to make change.”

“Make me think about my own Haitian culture that has disappeared.”

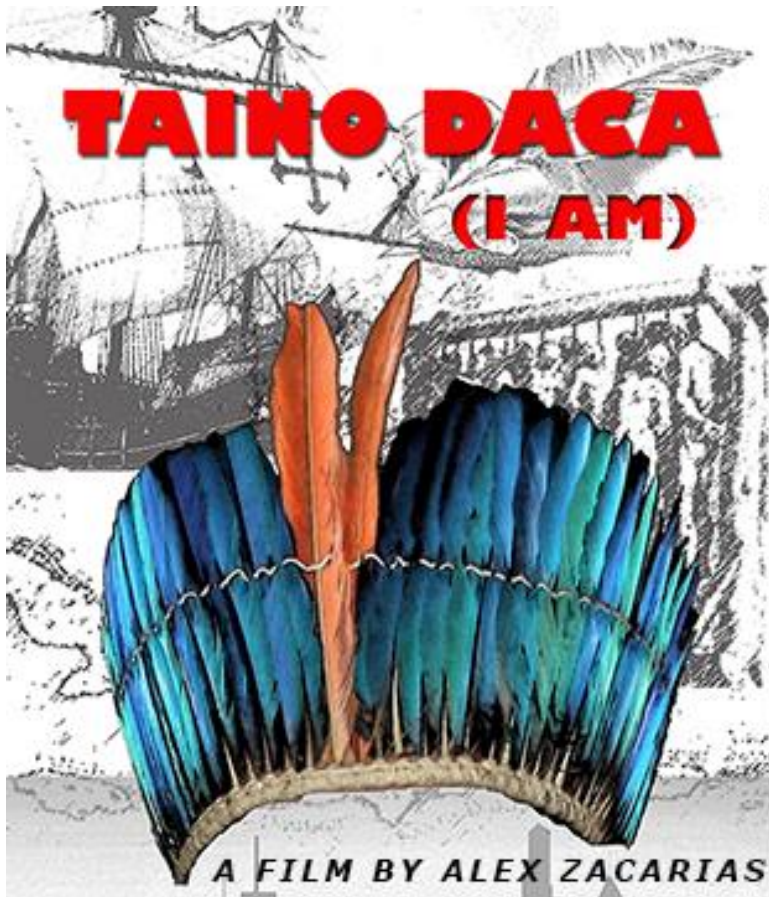
“It was wonderful.”

“I understand much better now (Thank God I saw this film).”



Alex Zacarias, Filmmaker/Creative Entrepreneur intersecting art, commerce and community. Emmy Award winning television producer with writing, directing, and editing skills of English and Spanish language television programming including documentaries, news, adult/children's educational series, and corporate/industrial videos.

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