

Mazamorreo: In Search of Memory

Documentary explores the African influence on artistic expression in Columbia

Zakiya Lathan
Features Editor

It began as a project intended to document indigenous artistic forms of expression: visual, musical and performance, and turned into a crusade to reveal to her native Columbia and to the rest of the world, the African influence which continues to exist in her country and which played a strong role in the early economic development of Columbia.

Videographer, Claudia Courbon presented her documentary "Mazamorreo: In Search of Memory/En Búsqueda de Memoria" to the College community on October 17.

Courbon produced and directed this documentary which was screened at Chicago's Latino Film Festival recently.

Courbon, who graduated from Chicago's School of the Art Institute with a B.F.A., with emphasis in video, stated in her biography, "Through my personal research, I have developed a deeper understanding of the social and political motivations to discredit and downplay African history in Columbia. I believe it is worthwhile to expose this cultural richness in the U.S., and interna-

tionally."

To this end, her video documents the legacy of the Africans who were introduced into the Pa-



Photo by Zakiya Lathan

Videographer Claudia Courbon poses before her talk which preceded the showing of her documentary.

cific lowland region of Columbia as a result of the slave trade which took place during the 16th and 17th centuries through interviews with

present day descendants.

Slaves were transported into the Cauca region of the pacific lowlands of Columbia by both the Spanish and the French in order to work the rich gold mines found there.

The Spanish speaking African slaves mined for gold using cross-tunneling methods as well as mazamorreo or panning techniques.

In the predominately African communities which still exist as a result of this history, mining continues to play a role in the economic stability of their towns, though the traditional mining culture of these communities is beginning to erode due to increasing Westernization.

One of the people interviewed in the documentary, Profesora Benedicta Grueso Ocoró, who was born in the town of Santa María de

Timbiquí in the Cauca region, described her life and family history. The daughter and granddaughter of miners, her early childhood was spent learning the traditions and techniques used for extracting gold from the earth.

As Courbon became older, she abandoned the low-paying mining life in order to devote time to her academic studies and now holds a Master's degree in Environmental Education. She lives and works in the community where she grew up and now assists women and children in her role as a community leader.

She coordinates a dance group which performs and celebrates traditional dance and music forms of the region.

The currulao is an example of a traditional dance form performed by her group, which is the result of the fusion of African and

Spanish culture in the region.

This dance is danced to rhythms defined by native instrument such as the marimba (an instrument with African roots), the cununo, the bombo and the guasa.

Many other cultural traditions which resulted from the fusion of African, Spanish and indigenous beliefs and traditions were highlighted and represented in this highly informative documentary which hit upon issues regarding the social and political aspects of Columbia's hidden tri-racial heritage.

Courbon, who has experience in documenting historical narrative through her past role as a video assistant for the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, plans to continue with her research into the Afro-Colombian cultures of the Pacific lowlands.

Life outside of the bubble

Kirsten Hufschmeier
Senior Staff Writer

Imagine working for a graphics company that works with Keebler, Bayer, Oscar Meyer, Pepsi and other large corporations. Now imagine the

he made prints and worked in the camera department. He then progressed to the Press Room and to "stripping," which actually consists of assembling type tints for the final film. With the technological advancements that have