

## Tarahumara Women of the Mountains

### Slide 3

- A. When the Spaniards extended their conquest of Mexico northward from the area that is now Mexico City, they gradually arrived in the area that is now the State of Chihuahua. When they arrived, they found several Indian civilizations, and they discovered silver. Many of the Indians were forced to labor in the mines and some of the civilizations were destroyed. The Tarahumara refused to submit, refused to give up their native religion and migrated into the Sierra Mountains.
  - B. The people established villages with an emphasis on the equality of all, with very little distinction between villagers. Accumulation of goods and power were strongly discouraged and viewed as a sign of evil or sickness.
  - C. Subsistence agriculture was practiced with the main crops being corn [maize], squash, and beans. The families had individual plots, but they were often worked communally with a sharing of the products. Corn had religious and practical significance. Some goats, chickens, and turkeys were also raised. The only time meat was eaten was during village fiestas and rituals.
  - D. Dancing and singing were central parts of the ceremonies designed to purify the entire village. Jesuit priests brought some elements of Christianity to the villages, but the primary beliefs were based on the traditions of worship of the sun, mother earth, the cardinal directions.
  - E. As the Mexican government attempted to bring the Tarahumara into the Mexican society, primary schools and health clinics were established, but neither brought much help to the people as infant mortality, malnutrition, and illiteracy were serious problems. Infants often died from simply intestinal disorders. Medical care was only in the form of a traveling nurse with a few medicines. The Tarahumara relied on traditional herbal medicine and religious rituals.
- I. The decision of many to immigrate to cities in the state of Chihuahua.
- A. During the 1980s and forward many of the Tarahumara migrated to the Cities of Chihuahua. We interviewed 50 Tarahumara women about their move to the cities.
    - 1. Some migrate temporarily each year to work in agriculture during the spring and fall. They live in shelters
    - 2. Others move permanently, and the men work low skill, poor wage jobs. Mexico has created neighborhoods called colonias for the permanent resident Tarahumara.
    - 3. The women interviewed moved to the cities so their children can go to school, have better health care, and better future. The Mexican government has established bilingual schools for the children with breakfasts and lunches for the children. The government also offers payments to families who allow their girls to attend the schools regularly.
  - B. Many still return to the mountains as often as possible. This is “home” where their religious practices and agriculture can be practiced.

### Slide 4

- II. Womens' lives in the city based on the interviews.
  - A. The women report that living in the cities is lonely with little social or economic support. Many live in extreme poverty. They have little support and are treated by most Mexicans as inferior. The poverty inclines many of the families to keep children out of school to beg or earn small amounts of money
  - B. In an effort to combat the problem the Mexican government has a policy of providing some land and building materials to create urban colonies where the Tarahumara women and men try to recreate village life in the city with their own council, community projects and gardens. They hold the fiestas and races that are traditional for those in the mountains.
  - C. Women offer stability, spend large amounts of time in household chores, and are often the colonia healers and organizers while the men spend very long hours working. The prospects for the urban migrants are not very hopeful for most of the migrants. A few educated Tarahumara are attempting to preserve the language and traditions and improve the living conditions.