PeaceJamMayan Renaissance
-- a Peacejam-produced movie that puts 4,000 years of Mayan history in perspective --
on Colorado Public Television
. The documentary, the first on the subject to be shot from the Mayan viewpoint, highlights the influence of European visitors on Central America and travels through 500 years of oppression before continuing to the Maya peoples' present-day struggle to preserve their culture...and also run for political office in Guatemala.

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"There's been a lot said about the Maya, but it's always some white professor at Harvard telling you what the deal is," Engle says. "They've never had their own voice heard, the Maya, and we see this as a chance."

In May, an audience at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York gave Engle and PeaceJam co-founder Ivan Suvanjieff a standing ovation at the conclusion of a screening of the film. But its most welcome reception has been from the culture it celebrates.

"The Maya love it because they see their story told onscreen for the first time exactly how they would tell it," says Engle. "We were trying to capture Mayan civilization without the denigrating tactics like historical reenactments on the History Channel. We didn't want it to be our view on anything. We wanted it to be the Mayan view."

To facilitate that perspective, the film's creators obtained artwork and artifacts, many of which had never been seen by outsiders, stretching back to the dawn of the Maya civilization. PeaceJam had already been working with the Maya peoples for seventeen years, collecting film footage along the way. The most difficult aspect of this production, then, was slimming 4,000 years of history down to one hour and eight minutes.
Somehow they managed, though, and *Mayan Renaissance* has since been translated into Spanish and distributed around the globe. PeaceJam sponsors are currently in talks with the prince of Monaco to stage a European release in Monte Carlo later in the year.

*Mayan Renaissance* is the first in PeaceJam's *Nobel Legacy Film Series*, which will showcase the work of a different Nobel Peace Prize laureate each year. Next year's edition, *Children of the Light*, features South African political activist Desmond Tutu, who delivered what Engle remembers as an "Earth-quaking" speech on social issues at the tenth anniversary celebration of PeaceJam in Denver 2006.

In 2014, *Educating the Heart* will follow the Dalai Lama's campaign to restructure global education with an experiment in Newark, New Jersey.

But in the meantime, 2012 is the perfect year to shine a spotlight on Mayan culture, aided by the onscreen presence of Rigoberta Menchú Tum, a Nobel laureate and indigenous Guatemalan who ran for the country's presidency in 2007 -- and survived.

"This is their time," Engle says. "For them to be so resilient, to preserve their culture over so many years and then step up now to lead is an incredible story of courage. When people watch the film, they're very inspired because they think that wow, in the face of all of this historical oppression and death, the Maya can create a niche for themselves in the world."

Watch *Mayan Renaissance* tonight on Colorado Public Television at 7 p.m.; it will repeat five more times through the weekend. Or wait and watch it on the big screen: On August 14, the *Denver Film Center* will present the film as part of its Women + Film series.