("The Margin at the Center," *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America*, ed. Georg M. Gugelberger [Durham: Duke UP, 1996] 24–25). According to the Casa de las Américas in Havana, which first recognized *I, Rigoberta Menchú* as a leading example of the genre, *testimonio* presupposes "knowledge of the facts by the author or his or her compilation of narratives or evidence obtained from the individuals involved or qualified witnesses. In both cases reliable documentation, written or graphic, is indispensable" (Beverley 39).

So there's no reason to apologize for comparing Menchú's account with what other survivors say. Moreover, there are important reasons for doing so—first and foremost, the monumental confidence in the urban left's view of peasants that *I, Rigoberta Menchú* inspired in readers. This is a book that we knew was true because it said what we expected to hear. It made an understandable but disastrous neo-*Guevarista* guerrilla movement, led by non-Indians like Arias, look like an inevitable expression of indigenous needs. It allowed us to discount the many Mayas who did not measure up to a high-cost agenda. It enshrined forms of militancy that, in the name of serving peasants, cost them so dearly that many joined fundamentalist Protestant churches and voted into power a right-wing law-and-order party. Loopy polemics against an anthropologist will not help anyone deal with this situation. They are only an excuse for running away from it.

David Stoll
Middlebury College

Reply:

Were David Stoll's letter not so personally injurious to me, I would be grateful to him for providing an example of his rhetorical strategies to readers unfamiliar with his work. He accuses through insinuation so that his target must spend energy mounting a defense against phantom charges rather than discussing academic or intellectual issues.

Stoll exploits the unfamiliarity that most *PMLA* readers have with both the political history of Guatemala and the administrative structure of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) to imply that I was the mastermind of a terrorist organization and that my stand on the Stoll-Menchú controversy led to the LASA presidency. Although I find Stoll's tactics unsavory, anti-intellectual, and insulting, for the benefit of *PMLA* readers I will clarify the issues he raises.

One only becomes eligible for the presidency after serving on the Executive Council (EC). On election, one serves as vice president for eighteen months before assuming the presidency. I had been a member of the EC since 1995 before being nominated for the presidency in September 1999. I ran on a platform, published in the *LASA Forum* in fall 1999, that does not mention Stoll. My curriculum vitae was published along with my platform, and it was on the basis of both that I was elected vice president in spring 2000. My article on the Stoll-Menchú controversy appeared in *PMLA* in January 2001, and *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy* came out in April 2001. As a dues-paying member of LASA, Stoll knows this, but he counts on the fact that most *PMLA* readers do not. His portrayal of my election is a dishonest attempt to discredit me and reduce my career to a footnote on his own c.v.

The same is true of his misrepresentation of my role in the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP). When the Guatemalan military dictatorship burned down the Spanish embassy in Guatemala City on 31 January 1980, I, like the vast majority of Guatemalans, was horrified. This event was as traumatic for us as the destruction of the World Trade Center has been for Americans. Then living in Mexico, I identified with the EGP's principles and collaborated with its diplomatic effort. I was not, however, a formal member, nor did I participate in armed activity. I simply attempted to publicize internationally the genocidal policies of the government to garner support for ending the massacres. When the EGP placed two bombs

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in public spaces and later jeopardized the lives of Mayas, I became disillusioned, and publicly broke with it in January 1984, speaking openly about the errors and moral turpitude of the leaders who carried out those heinous deeds. My modest trajectory as an ethical objector to dictatorship is not a secret: it appears in a paper I presented at the University of California, Santa Cruz (May 2001), in an article under consideration for *MLN*, and in a presentation at the MLA convention in 2001, in all of which I also summarize the documentation, public since 1985, regarding the internal rupture in the EGP.

In the first paragraph of his letter, Stoll claims that he wanted to "encourage debate over representation in Latin American studies," yet in his book he makes incendiary statements that blame the violence on the defeated guerrillas: "If anyone ignited political violence in Ixil country, it was the Guerrilla Army of the Poor" (9), and "Rigoberta reinvented her family to personify EGP ideology" (198). Stoll's letter, like his book, is littered with errors of fact and with tropes that elicit knee-jerk reactions, such as the mention of "Havana." Few *PMLA* readers know that Cuban scholars never theorized *testimonio* but limited themselves to reproducing American articles in Spanish. Stoll also attributes to me a definition of *testimonio* that comes from John Beverley, the scholar who first objected to Stoll's papers in the early 1990s. I did not participate in that debate, nor was I part of the group of academics that debated *testimonio* in the 1990s, a fact easily verified by examining bibliographies on the topic. Stoll also asserts that scholars like me are "hostile to other Mayan perspectives on the violence." After 1984, however, I disagreed politically with Menchú, and we did not speak to each other for ten years. I moved in the direction of Maya identity politics, as Kay Warren, from Harvard, has documented in her text about the emergence of the Maya movement. Finally, it is clear that Stoll did not read my article carefully. I never accused him of interviewing peasants in the presence of Guatemalan soldiers or in the offices of AID, but I did mention in a Guatemalan newspaper (not in an academic article) that an informant claims to have seen him interviewing in a pension routinely used by Guatemalan intelligence and says that he presented himself as an AID officer.

Who has the authority to make truth claims? How can we speak our truth and allow others to speak theirs as well? How can we allow the disempowered to make themselves heard without violence? It saddens me to see these important issues reduced to politics and, worse still, to academic politics. Stoll's innuendos seek to discredit those of us—Mayas, Central Americans, women—who have dared to raise our voices, and his misrepresentations desecrate the graves of the massacred victims, nearly all of whose deaths the United Nations' Truth Commission report has attributed to the Guatemalan army. Unfortunately, his indirect methods work: high schools, community colleges, and even universities in the United States have stopped teaching Menchú's text, despite its basic truths.

Guatemalans lived the opposition to a brutal, racist, and murderous dictatorship not as a distant or exotic adventure but as a life's ethical commitment. In the process we lost loved ones, close friends, relatives, our own illusions, and our youth. We welcome public debate on the issues, which offer an important lesson about the present situation in the Middle East, but we do not take kindly to Stoll's callous and factually inaccurate portrayal of our national tragedy.

Arturo Arias
University of Redlands

Huckleberry Finn

To the Editor:

At the 1995 American Literature Association convention in Baltimore, I presented a paper entitled "The Figure Forty in *Huckleberry Finn*," in which I argued that, among other reasons for using the figure forty, Mark Twain was frequently making quiet but conscious structural use of and reference to the phrase "forty acres and a mule." Before this, scholars such as Dan-

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