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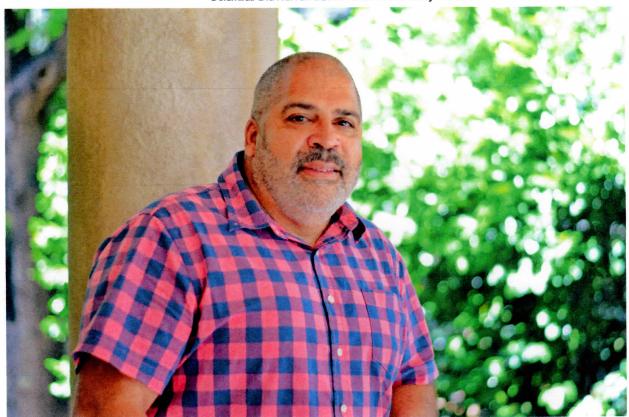Home > Columbus Did Not Kill Us All: Taino Documentary Proves It

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Columbus Did Not Kill Us All: Taino Documentary Proves It

Emmy-Award winning filmmaker Alex Zacarias recently spoke to ICTMN about his new documentary, Taino Daca (I Am). The 10-year project, set to be released this fall, takes on the grand challenge of revealing new truths about the history, survival and identity of the Taino people, the first indigenous contact for Christopher Columbus when he mistakenly arrived in the Caribbean.

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Zacarias explains that this film has a universal story for many tribes, not just for Taino. Referring to the arrival of Christopher Columbus, he says he wants to "bring attention to that story and show that history didn't begin in 1492, that there are thousands of years of 'our story.' The intent of the documentary is to bring awareness of our Taino story that we might be able to engage with government."

The Taino have struggled to get recognition since history books have long declared them to be an extinct people. "I am enrolled as a Taino through the United Confederation of Taino People, and I have identified as Taino through the U.S. Census."

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The 61 year-old Zacarias has been in the video/film industry for over 25 years and credits his grandmother as his greatest inspiration for making <u>Taino Daca (I Am)</u>. "My grandmother's words, 'Always remember your roots,' has resonated throughout my life.

"We are trying, as are other tribes, to maintain our culture, our language, and I think the one thing keeping us going is our storytelling and our ceremony... and the way it turned out was this documentary."

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"The biggest opposition is who we call the 'gatekeepers,' the ones that have a final word, which is usually historians or people in the educational fields. I'm trying to present new truth so that it may [prove] that the Taino are not extinct, that they were not all killed off.... to present a truth that we are here."

The Taino filmmaker, born on the Island of <u>Vieques, Borikén</u> (Vieques, Puerto Rico), immigrated to the US as a young child with his mother and was raised in Chicago, where he met his wife and then relocated to Green Bay, Wisconsin, where they have raised their two daughters.

One of the biggest challenges Zacarias faced was documenting the story over a decade and following the documentary's main character, <u>Roberto Mukaro Borrero</u>.

Borrero currently serves as a United Nations program and communications consultant for the International Indian Treaty Council, is president of the United Confederation of Taino People and is working with curators at the NMAI Smithsonian on a Taino exhibit showcasing the Caribbean Islands Taino population.

Borrero says, "This was a real chance to tell our own story."

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Zacarias relied on Borrero as a consultant. "I always go through the right channels and make sure the elders are ok with the process....I wanted him to help consult on everything- specifically for referencing the Taino way."

Borrero has fond memories of being in the film. "The most important message this film can impart is that people should have the right to be who they are and not what others tell them to be. All peoples should have a right to dignity and identity is an important part of this ideal. I think the film shares the reality that Taino are still here yet there are those who continue to deny us our human right of self-determination."

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