

1932 – Scars of Memory (Cicatríz de la Memoria)

A film by Jeffrey Gould and Carlos Henriquez Consalvi

[First Run / Icarus Films – 2002](#)

53 minutes / color-B&W

2003 Awards of Merit in Film, Latin American Studies Association

Honorable Mention, 2003 Festival de Film y Video de El Salvador

Reviewed by: John de Bry

Christopher Columbus's Landfall in the Bahamas, in 1492, and his subsequent voyages of exploration of the New World, profoundly affected the way Europeans perceived the world and energized the Renaissance movement. Most unfortunately, Columbus's Discovery also triggered the persecution and genocide of aboriginal populations, starting with the Taíno. The persecution and murder of Indians continues today.[1]

Scars of Memory is a compelling story of an unprecedented peasant uprising that erupted on January 22, 1932 in El Salvador. At the time, only 30 to 40 families controlled all of El Salvador while the indigenous and Ladino population lived in abject poverty, a situation the narrator compares with countries like France, Russia and Mexico before their revolutions. Poor farmers and peasants had no access to land and worked grueling hours for wages that were so insignificant that they could not even adequately support their families or provide a basic education for their children. Although ethnic tensions existed between Ladinos and Indians, many united in the revolt. Over a period of just three days ragtag groups of Ladino and Indian peasants took control of several towns, disrupted supply lines to most of the country's towns and villages and even attacked a military garrison. Many of the groups were organized and lead by members of Socorro Rojo, the Salvadorian Communist party. Reprisal was swift and brutal as the army and "citizen militias" organized by the Government indiscriminately attacked farms and villages, and retook towns seized by the rebels.[2]

Between 1998 and 2002, archival research was undertaken in repositories in El Salvador, Great Britain and the United States, and over 200 survivors of the uprising were interviewed. As the country remained under military dictatorship for six decades and was devastated by a 12-year civil war that ended in 1992, many of those eyewitnesses spoke for the first time. The memory of those terrible events is still fresh in their mind, as if they had taken place just a few years ago. Spoken in their native Spanish and with subtitles, witnesses after witnesses recall in horrific details the massacre of thousands of innocent men, women and children—estimated at over 10,000 over the period of a few weeks—and how priests singled out suspected communists and sympathizers and turned them over to the military who summarily executed them. In some villages all males over the age of 12 were slaughtered.[3]

[*Scars of Memory*](#) is an excellent and compelling documentary in which eyewitness testimonies and archival film footage and photographs combine to reveal a little-known historical event that has profoundly affected and changed the lives of many Salvadorians. Still fresh in the memory of many the documentary also draws our attention to the fact that the plight of Indians and Ladino of mixed blood is far from over. Persecution and sporadic murder of poor Indian peasants continue to this day, not only in El Salvador but also throughout Central and South America.[4]

Reviewer

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