

EL SALVADOR

A BRIEF HISTORY



Every year thousands of people make the long and dangerous journey from their home countries of

El Salvador
Guatemala and
Honduras to

claim asylum in the United States. We wonder why would they do that and why should we help them?

Here's a little history of one of the countries that might help us understand.

IMMIGRATION



The indigenous people of El Salvador have a complex history, spanning thousands of years before the Spanish conquest, and was comprised of many different cultural and political groups. The Aztec, Olmec, Toltec and Mayan people all had homes in El Salvador at one time or another.

The Lenca—who are associated with the Olmecs, and the Chorti, and Cuscatlan—who identify as Mayan, shared the area that is El Salvador now. They lived for hundreds of years mostly cooperatively but sometimes in hostility.

The Chorti spoke a language known as Cholti. Cholti was the language (now extinct) of the Mayan classical period; spoken in Copan, Tikal, and Palenque.

It seems to have spread from the Pacific Coast which suggests that Mayan culture originated in the area from Izapa in Mexico to Quelepa in eastern El Salvador and spread north from there between 2000 and 1000 B.C.. The highly accurate Mayan calendar also appears to have been created in Izapa—one of the oldest Mayan cities.

Most of the 600,000 contemporary indigenous people of El Salvador consider themselves Pipil. The Pipil migrated from the north into Salvador around 650 A.D. They spoke Nahuatl a language that is related to the Toltec people of the Nahuatl Nation. Pipil commoners were farmers, hunters, fishers, weavers, traders, and warriors. Agriculture was based on the widespread Mesoamerican cultigens of maize, beans, squash, and chili peppers. Other important food crops included tomatoes, peanuts, avocados, manioc and amaranth. The most important commercial crops cultivated were cacao (chocolate) and cotton.



Disease

was the Spanish's greatest weapon in the conquest of the Americas. Smallpox, malaria, measles, typhus, and yellow fever all ran ahead of the conquistadors from 1519 onwards. A smallpox epidemic swept through Guatemala in 1520-1521, and is also likely to have spread throughout the Pipil region of El Salvador.

By the time the Spanish arrived in the area in 1524, it is estimated that up to 50% of the native population of El Salvador had already been eliminated by the new diseases, against which they had no immunity.

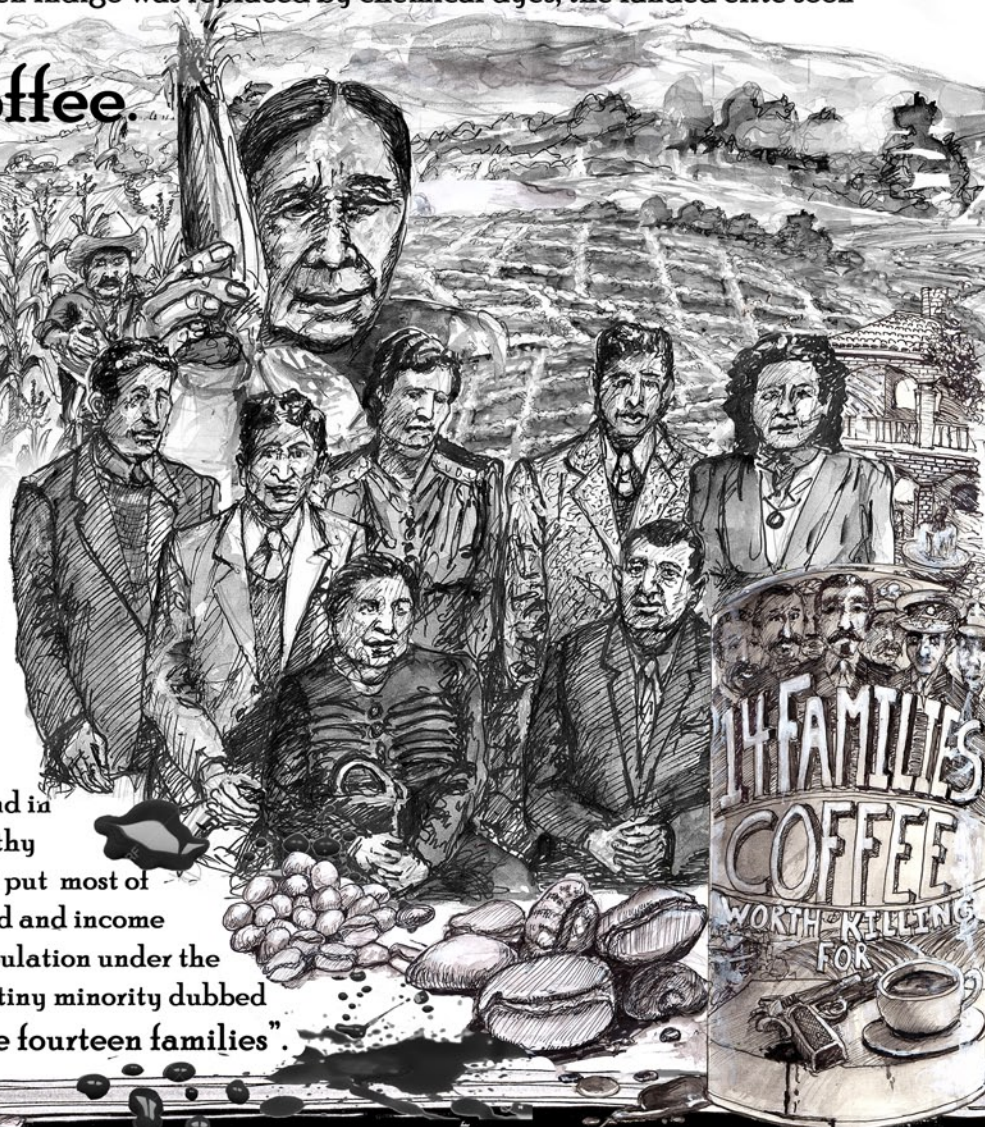
Further waves of epidemic diseases spread across Mesoamerica in 1545-48 and in 1576-81, reducing indigenous populations to just 10% of their precontact levels, making resistance against the European colonisers extremely difficult.


However the Pipil put up a fierce fight, driving the Spanish back on several occasions and staging numerous uprisings in the years that followed. Once the population was thought to be sufficiently pacified, a system that granted land and Indian peasants to Spanish padrones was established in order to force the Pipil to provide a tribute in cash crops to these district overlords. The people were forced to grow first cacao, and after the soil was exhausted from that, the native African plant Indigo (used to make a fashionable blue dye). This left the less productive lands, especially those around former volcanic eruptions, to the poor subsistence campesinos (peasant farmers) and Indian communes. In the middle of the 19th century when Indigo was replaced by chemical dyes, the landed elite soon changed to the newly popular crop-

Coffee.

In 1860 coffee became the main export and money crop of El Salvador. This led to a legal process that "privatized" the communal farming lands of the Pipil Indians and further consolidated land in the hands of a few wealthy

Spanish families. This put most of the control of food and income for the entire population under the authority of this tiny minority dubbed "the fourteen families".

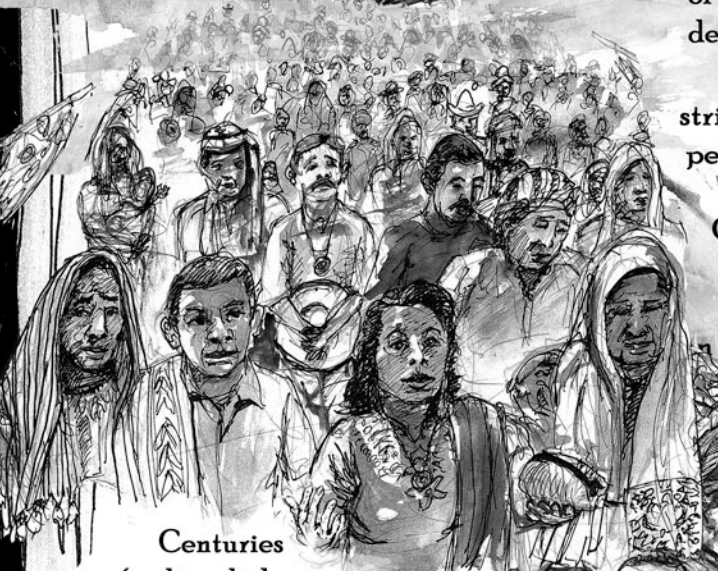




The indigenous population was forced to grow food on small plots of marginalized land while working to feed their families by picking coffee. In fact laws were created that made it a crime not to work on the coffee plantations at least part time. The principle market for this coffee was (and still is) the United States. When The Great Depression hit in the 1920s and the market dropped off the fourteen families took more land and cut wages in half to make up for their loss in profits.

After seventy years of being forced to pick coffee on less than subsistence wages with little access to farm land the people -most of them indigenous- rose up in a work strike to defend their own families.

The government responded to the strike by massacring an estimated 30,000 people, or 4% of the population, in one week. The military government of General Martinez following this massacre went on to try to wipe out every vestige of indigenous culture; language, traditional clothing, and music.



Centuries of cultural identity had to be hidden and denied. In response, the U.S. ended diplomatic relations and refused to recognise the government of Gen. Martinez.

IT'S DELICIOUS!



COFFEE THE FRIENDLY DRINK



The British did continue to provide aid during this period. Two years later the U.S. reestablished relations in support of Martinez's government despite no change in the General's policy. This brutal attitude set the political tone of the next several decades. One military dictator followed another into the 1970s.

Many U.S. corporations, including General Foods, Procter and Gamble, ESSO, Westinghouse, Kimberly-Clark, and Texas Instruments, established operations in El Salvador during these years to take advantage of the low wages and lack of labor laws. These companies' interests often coincided with those of the oligarchs, serving to deepen the disparity in wealth.

The U.S.

government continued to provide financial and military aid in support of the oligarchs, American companies and Salvadoran dictators. The profits and goods flowed out of the country while Salvadorans continued to live

below the poverty level with limited access to potable water, education, health care and employment, while the coffee barons lived in fabulous wealth.

In the 1970s, students, labor groups, teachers (some of the most prominent dissenters), community members and religious leaders organized to demand reforms to create a more equitable society. Twice progressive candidates were elected president (1972, 1977), yet due to fraudulent election procedures they were not installed in government. Marches were organized, the protesters were fired upon by the police; dozens were killed and "disappeared". Late in 1970s death squads created by the coffee barons and often comprised of government forces began to target these same community organizers. Hundreds of bodies a month were left on the sides of roads as a warning to others.

After more than a hundred years of disregard, abuse murder, forced labor, state created poverty and criminalization of native identity the people began joining a growing leftist insurgency known as the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN). The United States decided to side with the government against the population and increased military aid and advisors out of fear of a communist domino effect in the region. The Carter administration provided economic support aimed at land reform and at times interrupted their military support over concerns about human rights abuses and military coups, but generally continued to support the economic and political elite.

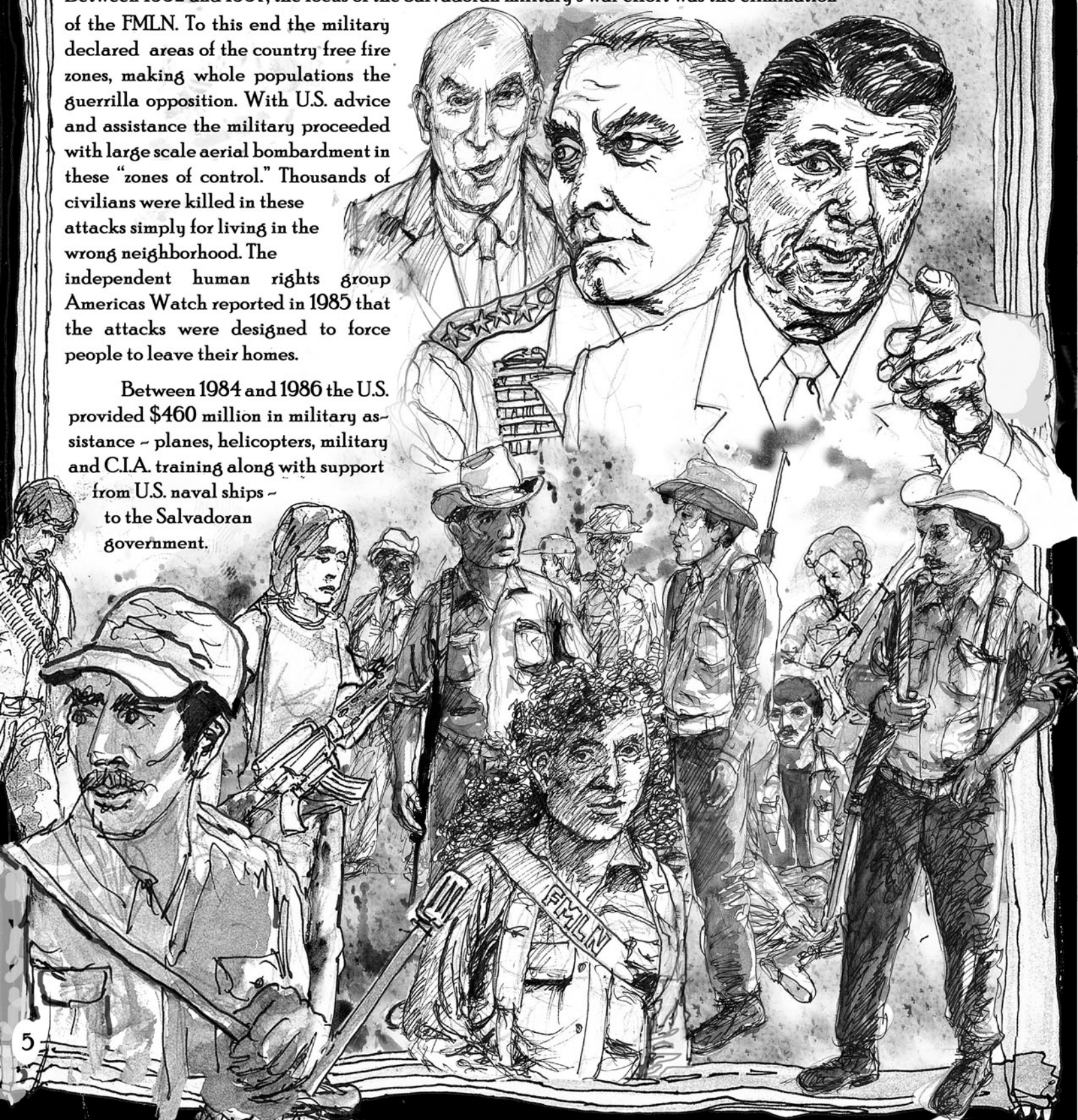


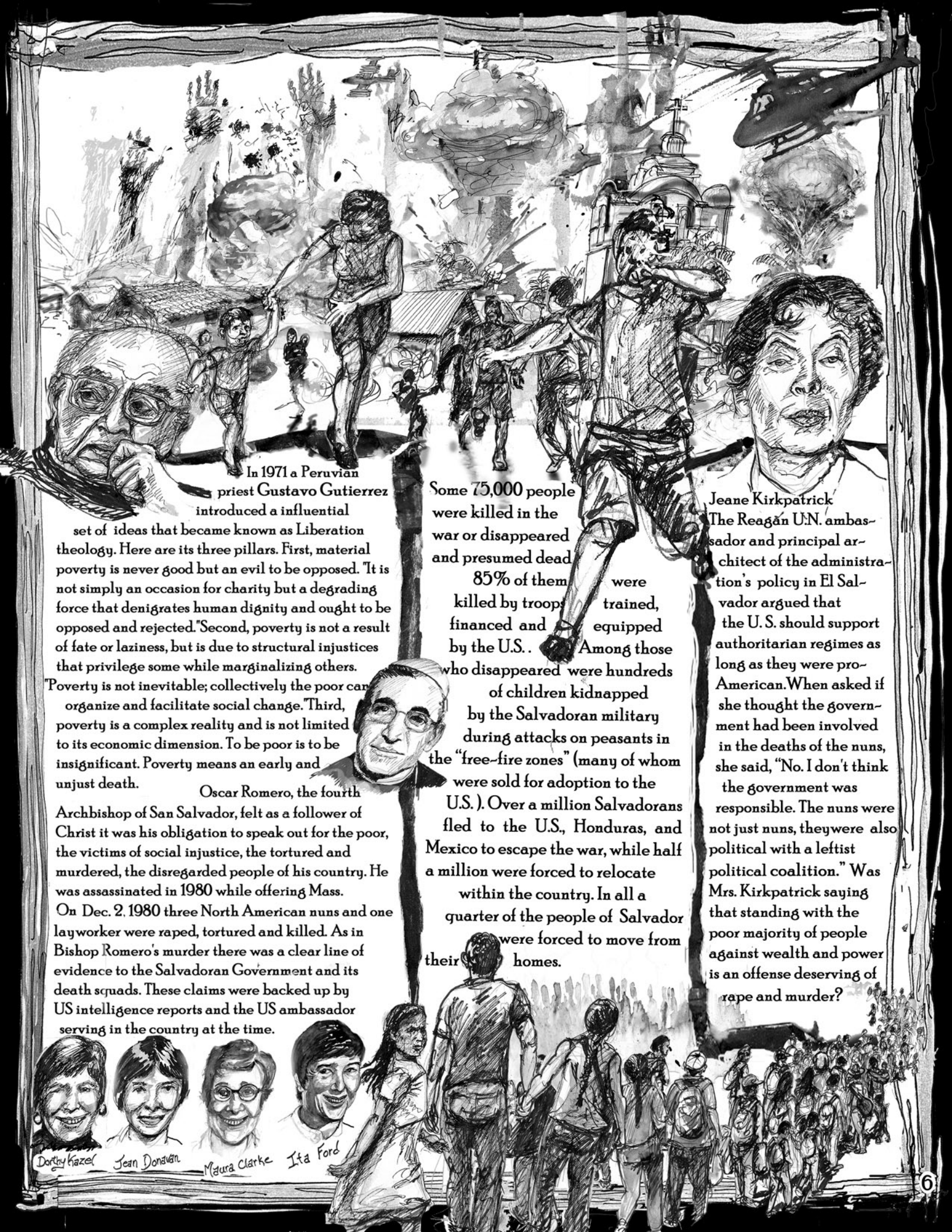
In 1981 when

Ronald Reagan took over the presidency, the U.S. reinstated military assistance, increased the number of CIA advisors and generally saw El Salvador's insurgency as a conflict with global meaning, and an opportunity to show its toughness and a conscious effort to repair America's image abroad after Vietnam. They were determined "to control world events" in a way that the Carter administration did not.

The organizing of the FMLN took the country into a full-fledged civil war. Increased resistance was answered by intensified repression. While death squad activity continued, all-out war tactics were initiated. Between 1982 and 1987, the focus of the Salvadoran military's war effort was the elimination of the FMLN. To this end the military declared areas of the country free fire zones, making whole populations the guerrilla opposition. With U.S. advice and assistance the military proceeded with large scale aerial bombardment in these "zones of control." Thousands of civilians were killed in these attacks simply for living in the wrong neighborhood. The independent human rights group Americas Watch reported in 1985 that the attacks were designed to force people to leave their homes.

Between 1984 and 1986 the U.S. provided \$460 million in military assistance - planes, helicopters, military and C.I.A. training along with support from U.S. naval ships - to the Salvadoran government.





In 1971 a Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutierrez introduced a influential

set of ideas that became known as Liberation theology. Here are its three pillars. First, material poverty is never good but an evil to be opposed. "It is not simply an occasion for charity but a degrading force that denigrates human dignity and ought to be opposed and rejected." Second, poverty is not a result of fate or laziness, but is due to structural injustices that privilege some while marginalizing others.

"Poverty is not inevitable; collectively the poor can organize and facilitate social change." Third, poverty is a complex reality and is not limited to its economic dimension. To be poor is to be insignificant. Poverty means an early and unjust death.

Oscar Romero, the fourth Archbishop of San Salvador, felt as a follower of Christ it was his obligation to speak out for the poor, the victims of social injustice, the tortured and murdered, the disregarded people of his country. He was assassinated in 1980 while offering Mass. On Dec. 2, 1980 three North American nuns and one lay worker were raped, tortured and killed. As in Bishop Romero's murder there was a clear line of evidence to the Salvadoran Government and its death squads. These claims were backed up by US intelligence reports and the US ambassador serving in the country at the time.

Some 75,000 people were killed in the war or disappeared and presumed dead

85% of them were killed by troops trained, financed and equipped by the U.S. Among those who disappeared were hundreds of children kidnapped by the Salvadoran military during attacks on peasants in the "free-fire zones" (many of whom were sold for adoption to the U.S.). Over a million Salvadorans fled to the U.S., Honduras, and Mexico to escape the war, while half a million were forced to relocate within the country. In all a quarter of the people of Salvador were forced to move from their homes.

Jean Kirkpatrick The Reagan U.N. ambassador and principal architect of the administration's policy in El Salvador argued that the U.S. should support authoritarian regimes as long as they were pro-American. When asked if she thought the government had been involved in the deaths of the nuns, she said, "No. I don't think the government was responsible. The nuns were not just nuns, they were also political with a leftist political coalition." Was Mrs. Kirkpatrick saying that standing with the poor majority of people against wealth and power is an offense deserving of rape and murder?



About half of the

of the immigrants ended up in refugee camps in Honduras or in Salvadoran enclaves in Costa Rica, Nicaragua or Mexico. The other half came to the U. S., with the greatest number of these refugees settling in the Pico-Union and Westlake districts of Los Angeles. These lower income neighborhoods already had an established underground economy, mostly

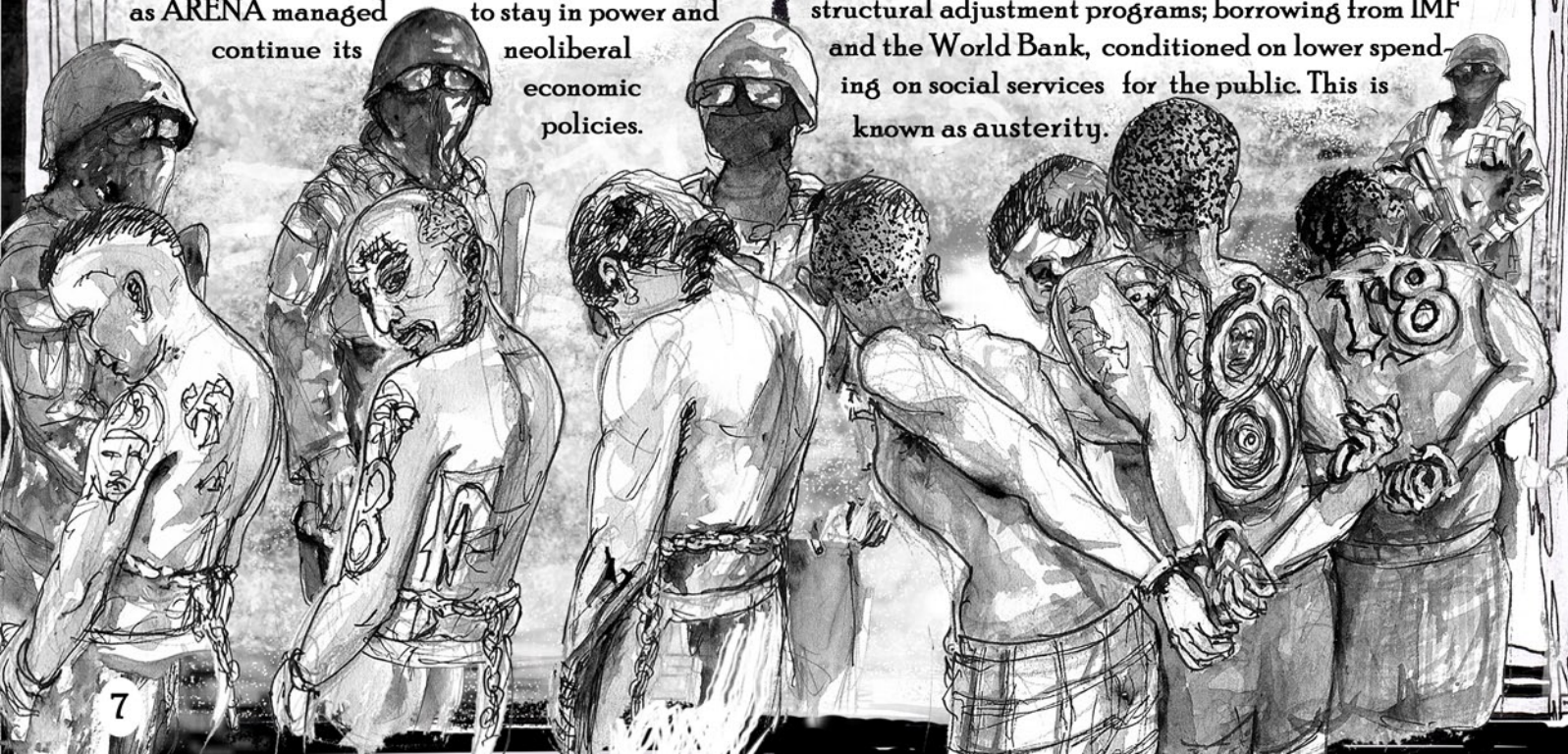
controlled by Mexican and African American gangs. In response to this hostile environment the young war hardened immigrants formed their own gangs for self-protection and as a means of subsistence in an area with scarce employment and little opportunity. Gaining territory in these rough neighborhoods required a brutal reputation for violence and reprisal. These children of trauma were psychologically able and economically motivated to become a vicious and violent force in their new home where violence was seen as the means of gaining respect and social advancement. Several strong gangs rose to the top in this struggle of which Mara Salvatrucha (MS 13) and Barrio

18 are the largest. Toward the end of his presidency Bill Clinton's government began a program of deportation of foreign-born residents convicted of a wide range of crimes. This enhanced deportation policy, in turn, vastly increased the number of gang members being sent home to El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and elsewhere. This set a precedent for the Bush administration, who went on to return 20,000 criminals to Central America between 2000 and 2004. That trend continues and is getting worse under the Trump administration's "no tolerance" policies..

As these gangs were forming, the war in El Salvador ground on through the '80s until a peace accord was reached in 1992, which made the FMLN a political party. The party in charge, ARENA, had borrowed heavily during the war years and increased the national debt from \$500 million to \$2.2 billion. The peace accords focused on security - creating a civilian police force and reducing the role of the military in civil matters- but did little to address the underlying problems of economic inequality and opportunity. In fact, inequality grew after the war as ARENA managed to stay in power and

continue its neoliberal economic policies.

Armando Calderón Sol was the Salvadoran president from 1994 to 1999 and an heir to one of the coffee family fortunes. He is known for the privatization of state-owned telephone companies and pension funds and promoting free enterprise zones, removing trade barriers, including removing protection for local agriculture. This had the consequence of disrupting small scale farming, driving migration to larger cities (and the U.S.) and creating a cheaper labor supply for the free enterprise companies. Calderón followed President Alfredo Cristiani's neoliberal economic approach and structural adjustment programs; borrowing from IMF and the World Bank, conditioned on lower spending on social services for the public. This is known as austerity.



led peace talks failed to address the socioeconomic underpinnings of the conflict, which helped to set the neoliberal economic policies that are still in place today. This agenda encourages foreign investment, so multinational corporations can utilize the people's labor at the lowest costs possible and then export most of the profits along with the consumer goods leaving enough behind to ensure that the wealthy elite (still basically the fourteen families who are now mostly in banking and finance) can stay economically and politically in control (ARENA). These practices create deep economic inequality, take land away from farming, disregard environmental standards, create jobs that are unstable, deny workers the right to organize and set up a dynamic that facilitates the exploitation of workers. With high unemployment rates and little available land for farming the people are vulnerable to abuses on many levels, while multinational corporations are given huge tax incentives and exemptions. Essentially they are allowed to create autonomous zones of control (Free Enterprise Zones) with very little accountability or sense of responsibility to the country's or the people in which they are located.



It was in this unbalanced neo-liberal economy and war ravaged society that the prison harden men of MS-13 and Barrio-18 were dropped into. Some spoke little spanish most had little or no connections or support systems in El Salvador which strengthened their ties with their gang. Without prospects for work in a society with high unemployment rates they turned to what they knew; extortion of the population through violence and threats. The two gangs (now three, Barrio-18 split) killed each other at much higher rates then in the U.S. in their effort to gain territory and personal status. Death tolls often reach the rates of the eighties death squads.

Salvadorans have continuously opposed this privatization of their country's basic services with large street demonstrations. In 2003, when ARENA tried to push through the privatization of national healthcare, hundreds of thousands of medical workers, hospital unions and citizens filled the streets in what was called the "White Marches."

Massive opposition was mobilized against ARENA's acceptance of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) with the U.S., which was passed in a constitutionally questionable vote that required the legislature to be surrounded by anti-riot police. In 2007, community resistance to the environmental contamination caused by gold mining forced the ARENA administration to declare a nationwide moratorium on metallic mining.



In 2018 when ARENA regained control of the legislature they renewed their push for the inclusion of the privatization of all water, higher education and healthcare as a prerequisite to receive a U.S. aid package from the Millennium Challenge Corporation (a U.S. agency that promotes free-market policies). This was also supported by the National Private Business Association and the Salvadoran Association of Industrialists and the U.S. Embassy in Salvador. This prompted large street demonstration once again.



Students and staff

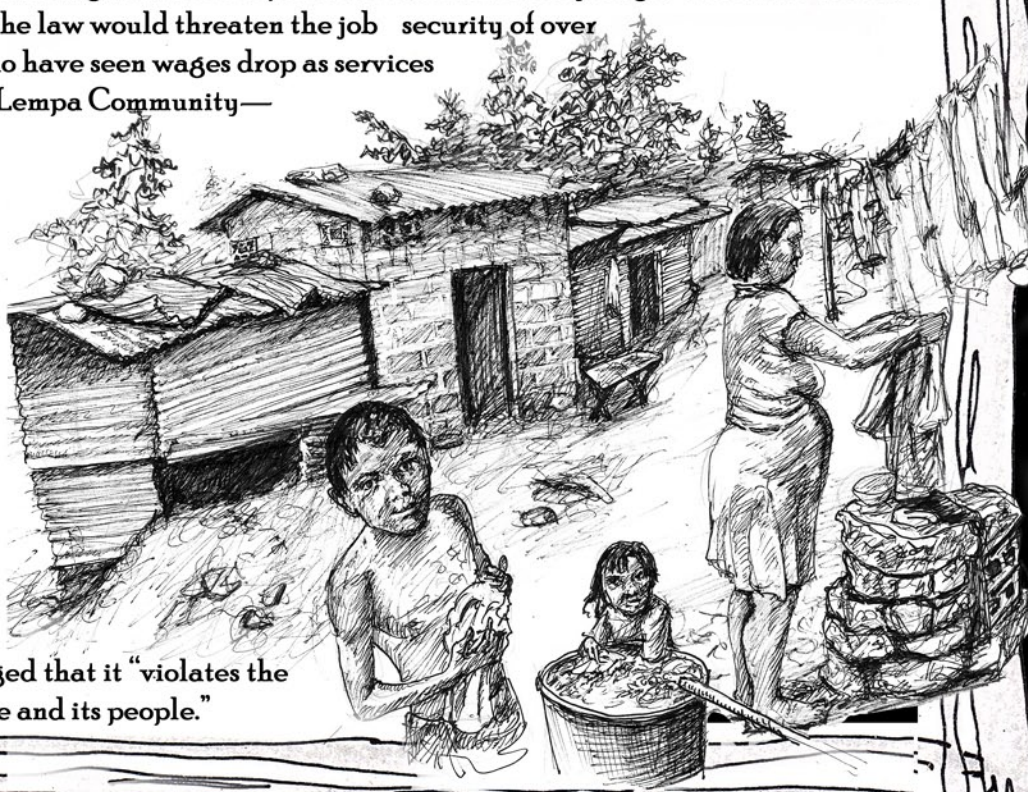
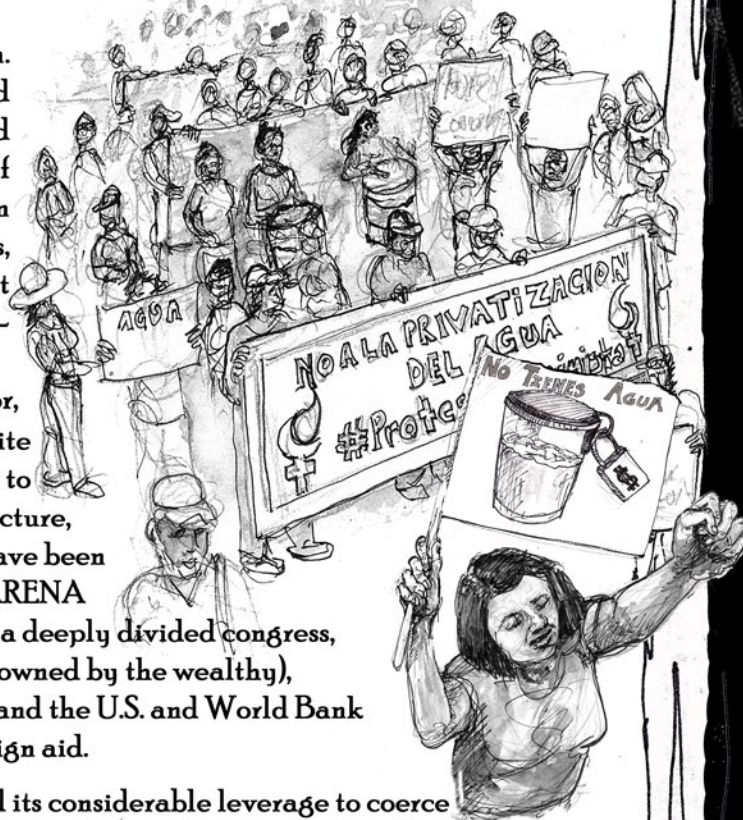
of the National University of El Salvador joined with union workers, war veterans, the Catholic church, members of the National Alliance Against Water Privatization, the National Water Forum, as well as conservation groups and citizens to demand a law that defines and protects water as a human right, ensuring its universal access.

ARENA was not the FMLN's only peacetime opposition. The U.S., the oligarchy's steadfast ally, shamelessly interfered in every election cycle, with State Department officials and congressional representatives threatening to cut off remittance flows and deport Salvadorans should the left win an election. In 2009 due to pressure from U.S. citizens groups, the U.S. finally recognised the FMLN as a political party. That same year the FMLN candidate, Maricio Funes, was successfully elected president. This was accomplished through a dedicated campaign of the FMLN's constituency—the poor,

marginalised people. In spite of all this popular support to reform the social infrastructure, President Funes's efforts have been greatly impeded by an ARENA appointed supreme court, a deeply divided congress, major media outlets (all owned by the wealthy), flagrant electoral abuse and the U.S. and World Bank threats to withhold foreign aid.

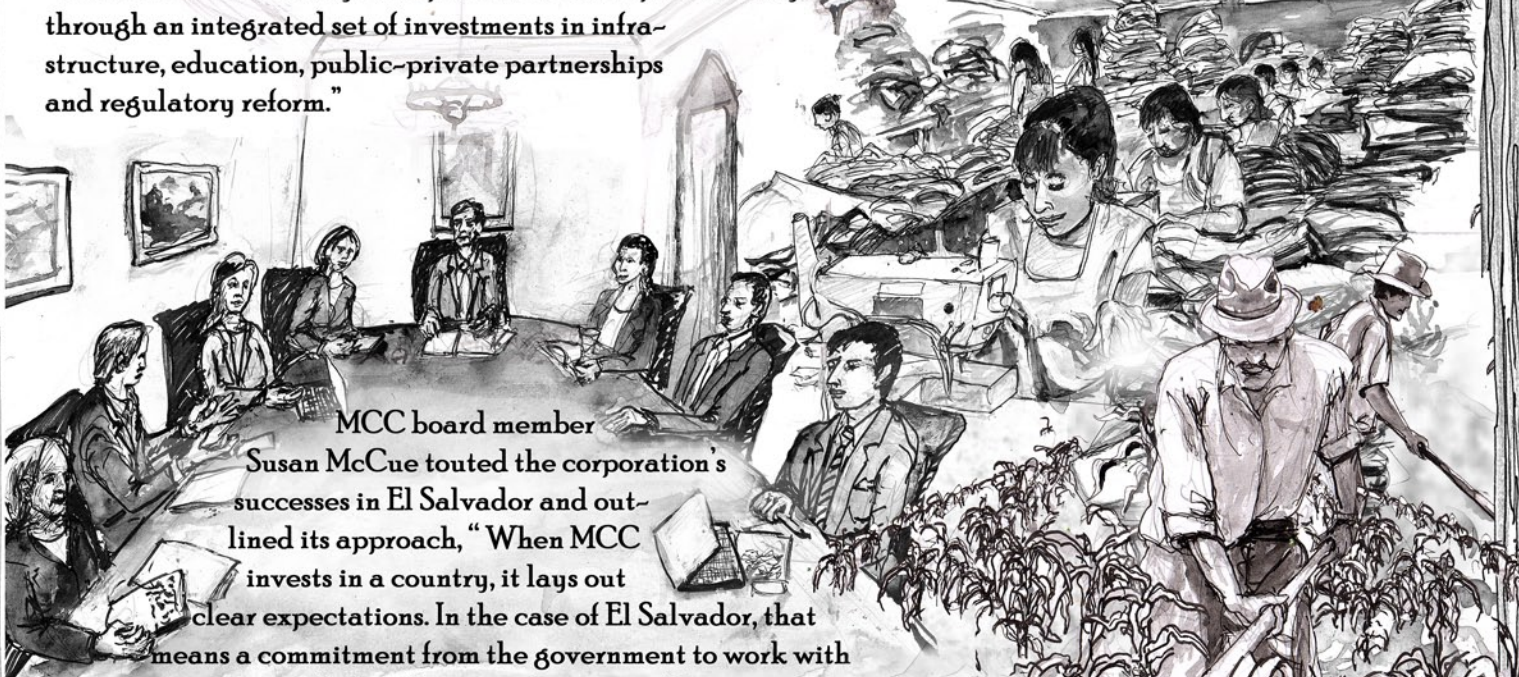
In 2014 the U.S. used its considerable leverage to coerce El Salvador into enacting a Public-Private Partnership law. This law, an initiative of El Salvador's bilateral trade agreement with the U.S., was written by the U.S. Treasury Department along with advisors from the IMF, World Bank and the outgoing administration of President Funes.

The proposed partnership was unveiled in 2011 during a visit by President Obama. Since its introduction, unions, to whom the new law guarantees no protections, have fiercely fought the Public-Private Partnership. If fully implemented, the law would threaten the job security of over 120,000 public-sector workers, who have seen wages drop as services have become privatized. The Bajo Lempa Community—a coalition of communities formed by ex-combatants and refugees from the civil war—warned in a statement that “the promises of employment and economic growth that were to accompany privatization, [U.S.] dollarization and the signing of the Free Trade Agreement have never materialized. In their place, poverty, violence, [a] deteriorating environment and corruption have all increased.” The community has called the Public-Private Partnership “blackmail” and charged that it “violates the sovereignty of the Salvadoran state and its people.”




The Millennium Challenge

Corporation (MCC) is a foreign aid agency of the U.S. government, created by Congress in 2004, with the stated goals "to enhance the country's competitiveness and productivity through an integrated set of investments in infrastructure, education, public-private partnerships and regulatory reform."



MCC board member Susan McCue touted the corporation's successes in El Salvador and outlined its approach, "When MCC invests in a country, it lays out clear expectations. In the case of El Salvador, that means a commitment from the government to work with the private sector to slash red tape and create public-private partnerships." What McCue's glowing review omits is that the MCC actively coerced the government - apparently at Washington's direction - to roll back a social welfare program of the Funes administration that targeted poor rural farmers, among other demands.

The program in question, a free seeds and fertilizer plan initiated by President Funes, was designed to prevent hundreds of thousands of subsistence farmers from experiencing food insecurity. Instead it was deemed in violation of the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). The MCC withheld hundreds of millions of development dollars until the government agreed to eliminate the subsidy and open local seed markets to international competition. However, farmers across Salvador united to block a stipulation in the agreement that would have indirectly required them to purchase Monsanto seeds. As a result of their protests they are able to continue to grow and plant their own seeds.



The MCC applies "stringent eligibility criteria to select its partners," once selected it uses its investment to "leverage and incentivize policy, regulatory and institutional reforms." In 2014 the MCC signed a new \$277 million compact to "improve the country's regulatory environment, enhance the role of public-private partnerships in delivering key services, improve the quality of education and improve a key highway and border crossing infrastructure to reduce transportation costs." In the north, they are improving a border crossing to enhance the movement of freight. And in the south, they are hoping to develop the tourist industry and encourage foreign investment by creating a port to

assist in the import of raw goods to be assembled in foreign run free trade zones -service parks, or Maquiladoras. These are factories that are largely allowed to run duty and tariff free. They take raw materials and assemble, manufacture or process them and export the finished product as well as much of the profits.



Services Law (ISL) the businesses operating in these "service parks" get exemptions from tariffs for the import of capital goods: machinery, equipment, tools, supplies, accessories, furniture and other goods needed for their manufacturing activities, as well as full and indefinite exemption from income tax and municipal taxes on company assets. Service park developers and service park administrators are exempted from income tax for 15 years, municipal taxes for ten years and real estate transfer taxes. However, if the services are provided to the Salvadoran market, they cannot receive the benefits of the ISL. President Ceren resisted investors pressure to completely privatize these service parks and cede all governance to these private corporations for a 50 year period. This would have included all regulations for labor, environment, police and security, regardless of laws in the rest of the country. This model seems to be gaining approval in Guatemala and Honduras.

A report published in 2014 by the Maquila Solidarity Network describes service park workers as getting an average wage that is only able to meet 37 % of food and services needed to meet the cost of a basic living. However after an extended public campaign the Ceren government increased the minimum wage by 29 % in 2015, getting workers to 66% of earning a basic living. This wage increase has provoked a strong backlash from El Salvador's rabidly anti-union private sector, with business lobbies issuing legal challenges, factories firing workers and threatening to relocate to countries with cheaper labor costs.

MINIMUM WAGES IN EL SALVADOR AS OF JANUARY 1, 2017

	PER HOUR	PER DAY	PER MONTH
1. Commerce and Services			
2. Industry	\$1.25	\$10.00	\$300
3. Sugar Refineries			
4. Maquila, Textile, and Garments	\$1.25	\$9.84	\$295
5. Sugarcane Harvesting			
6. Coffee Mills	\$0.93	\$7.47	\$224
7. Agricultural Workers			
8. Coffee Harvesting			
9. Cotton Harvesting	\$0.83	\$6.87	\$224
10. Cotton Mills			

El Salvador's garment exports are expected to rise by 6% in 2018 with synthetic activewear: socks, pants, cotton pull-overs and T-shirts topping the list. Companies such as Hanes, Texops (supplier goods for Luluware yoga pants), Textufil (yarn, thread, knit fabric, print - ed fabric) St. Jacks (activewear for children) and Petennatli (womens fashion) are all increasing investment. Despite this 6% rise in exports the Salvadoran economy is expected to grow by only 2% in 2018.



Even with all of

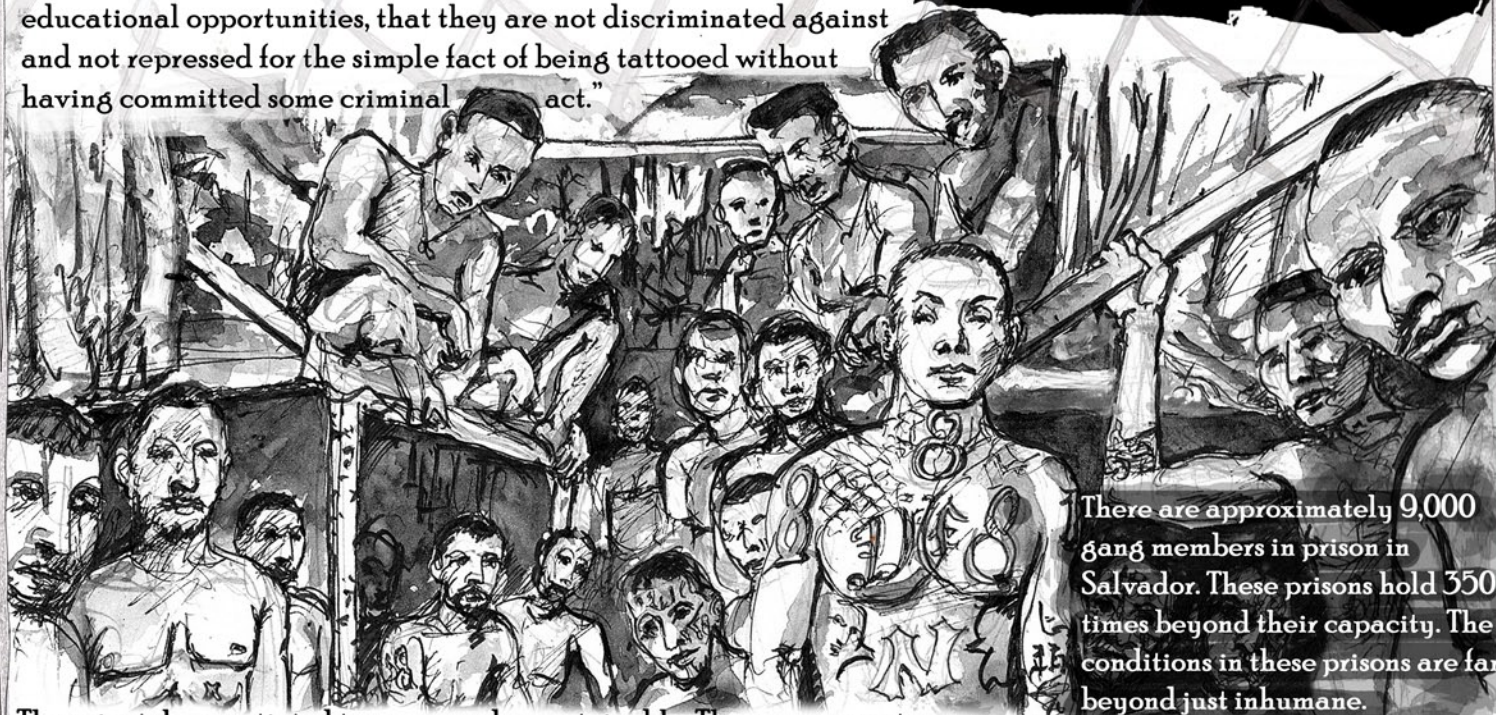
these challenges the Funes/Ceren administrations oversaw the creation of a national literacy program in which high school students used their community service hours to teach reading, writing and basic arithmetic to adults. They also implemented a program to provide a yearly packet of school supplies to each elementary school student - shoes and uniforms made locally by small-scale producers, the cost for which was previously a burden on families. Schools also began to serve milk and a small meal of rice and beans, sourced from local agricultural producers, providing much-needed nutrition for children and stimulus for local economies. President Sánchez Cerén extended these programs through to the high school level. Comprehensive "Women's City" service centers were created across the country providing mental and reproductive healthcare, legal support, and childcare, while offering credit and job training. They created a family agriculture program that distributes locally sourced bean and corn seeds to small farmers.

The party has also overseen major gains against government corruption. They implemented an Access to Public Information Law and launched an Open Government digital portal. 150 cases of corruption uncovered from previous ARENA administrations have been sent to the attorney general's office for investigation. (In 2018 former ARENA president Elisac Saca -2004-09- plead guilty to embezzling \$390 million dollars from state coffers into his personal bank accounts.) Further reforms have sought to make the democratic process more participatory and accessible, implementing a nationwide residential voting system, going from 460 voting centers in 2009 to 1,600 in 2015. The government also adopted measures to ensure the right to vote for LGBTQ voters and inaugurated an absentee voting system for disabled voters.



In 2012 Father Fabio Colindres, a local Catholic Bishop, and Raul Mijango, a former FMLN guerilla negotiated a truce between Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Barrio 18. For the next 15 months the homicide rate dropped by 53 percent. The gangs officially agreed to the following points: 1) to cease all types of hostilities between the two gangs; 2) to cease attacks on members of the national police; 3) to cease attacks on members of the armed forces; 4) to cease attacks against members of the penitentiary system; and 5) to avoid producing any more civilian casualties. Here is part of a statement released by the gangs in reference to the truce, "We do not ask to be pardoned for crimes already committed, only that the law is fairly applied, that we are treated as human beings, that we are supported in the social and productive reintegration of our members giving them work and educational opportunities, that they are not discriminated against and not repressed for the simple fact of being tattooed without having committed some criminal act."

Between 1996 and 2015 the U.S. deported to their countries of origin 2.4 million people who had committed a felony crime. The number of these convicts deported to El Salvador reached 95,000, or roughly 1.5 percent of the country's population. In 2017 alone 1,241 Saldorans with alleged connection to gangs were deported. More than double from the previous year. In the two years between 2013 and 2015, the US deported more than 300,000 Hondurans, Guatemalans and Salvadorans with criminal records, many of them the children of refugees of the 1970s and '80s.



There are approximately 9,000 gang members in prison in Salvador. These prisons hold 350 times beyond their capacity. The conditions in these prisons are far beyond just inhumane.

The privately negotiated truce proved unsustainable. The government was never fully on board and failed to prepare the population for the announcement of the truce, and never followed through on the second phase of negotiations between the government and the gangs. The main negotiating position of the gangs, prioritizing the social, economic and political components of integrating them into society, never really got any attention. The third and final blow to the truce was contextual. Due to the immense harm that the gangs had inflicted upon society, the idea of granting any concessions was extremely unpopular, and as the 2014 election drew closer, ARENA used the truce to paint the ruling FMLN as soft on gangs, a charge that was hard to refute in part because the gangs continued to make a living through extortion and kidnapping. As a result of these failures the country was plunged back into violence in 2016.



In an effort to be tough on gangs, President Cerén had 18 people involved in the truce negotiations -including Raul Mijango- arrested, sending a clear message that no negotiated settlement will be acceptable. Instead they have begun an all out assault on gangs dubbed "Iron Fist." In 2016 security forces killed 591 gang members, in "confrontations" eight police officers and two soldiers died in those clashes. But perhaps some benefit did accrue from the truce in that the two gangs have agreed not to kill each other. These tough on crime tactics are supported and largely funded by the U.S., and under the Trump administration much of the non-security funding is also tied to the implementation of Iron Fist.

In a 2017 report

the U.N.'s special rapporteur for extrajudicial executions Agnes Callamard, found that, "the Special Reaction Force of El Salvador's National Police Force (Fuerza Especializada de Reacción, or FES) is responsible for the illegal killings of 43 gang members in the first six months of 2017 alone". The accusations fit into a "pattern of behavior by security personnel amounting to extrajudicial executions." The U.N. claims that 92 percent of investigations against the Salvadoran police are dismissed within three days, and that units previously accused of human rights abuses are simply rebranded but keep the same personnel.

In 2016 the U.S. provided \$67.9 million to the Salvadoran police, and \$72.7 million in 2017. The exact recipients and nature of U.S. funding are shrouded in secrecy. Although publicly available documents rarely specify which units benefit from these monies they do say that "vetted units" get mentors from the FBI and DEA. Two sources with knowledge of the US train-and-equip program, who did not want to be identified because of the sensitivity of the matter, told CNN that the FES was the recipient of U.S. assistance.

MINISTERIO DE RELACIONES EXTER
DE EL SALVADOR

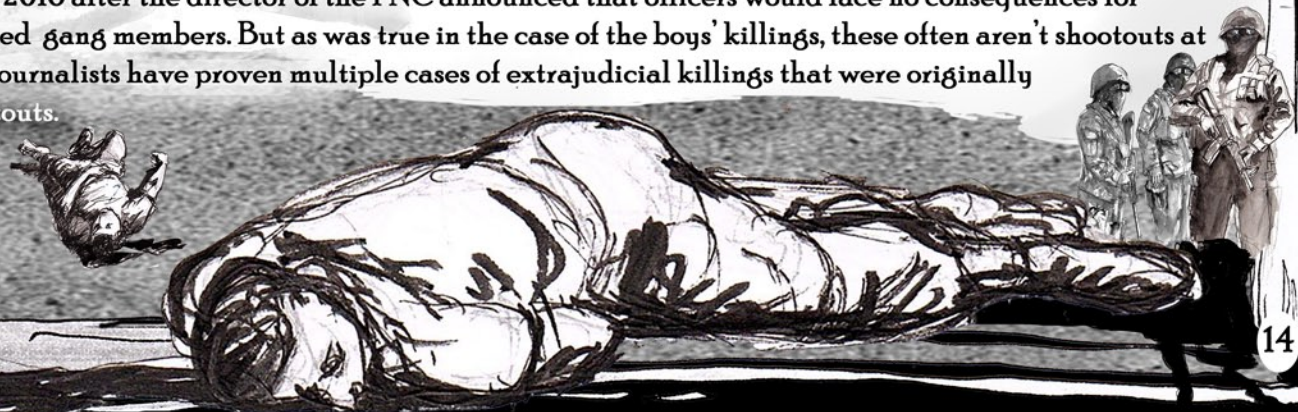
On behalf of the American people, we promote and demonstrate democratic values and advance a free, peaceful and prosperous world. The U.S. Department of State leads America's foreign policy through diplomacy, advocacy and assistance by advancing the interests of the American people, their safety and economic prosperity.

Mission Statement of the U.S. Department of State

Late one morning in the fall of 2016, police officers of the Salvadoran National Civil Police, known by its Spanish initials, PNC, handcuffed a group of middle school aged boys on a street in a neighborhood on the outskirts of San Salvador. The boys were serving as lookouts for members of MS-13. After handcuffing them, the police officers commandeered a nearby home, forcing the family out, then took the boys onto the back patio. The officers proceeded to torture and kill them; it took several hours. Neighbors later said they could hear the boys pleading for their lives as the officers laughed.

The internal police report says a confidential informant called the police to report that MS-13 members were gathered on a corner, and that when the police arrived, a shootout ensued. It states -falsely, according to witnesses- that the boys were killed in the exchange of gunfire.

Such incidents are all too common in El Salvador, where there is an alarming pattern of escalating police violence. The PNC uses the term "shootout" to explain police killings of young people suspected of gang membership. The number of so-called shootouts jumped from 39 in 2013 to 591 in 2016 after the director of the PNC announced that officers would face no consequences for shooting suspected gang members. But as was true in the case of the boys' killings, these often aren't shootouts at all. Salvadoran journalists have proven multiple cases of extrajudicial killings that were originally reported as shootouts.



MS-13 and the two factions of Barrio 18

(the 18th Street gang), have around 65,000 members in El Salvador, according to police records. But many more people depend on the gangs for their livelihood. These gangs are active in 94 percent of El Salvador's 262 municipalities. In many of these "red zones," gangs are not just a standing danger to public safety but also a de facto authority that exerts tremendous control over residents' daily lives. In neighborhoods throughout San Salvador, residents heading to work or school pass through an informal checkpoint where a young lookout (sometimes barely eight years old) asks everyone for a dollar. Most people just pay, anyone who doesn't might come to regret it later. Extortion at places of business is the bigger problem. At least once a week, older gang members come by every shop and vendors' stalls in the neighborhood market to collect the renta, or protection money, from merchants who can't afford their own security guards. Despite this extortion, gang members are some of the poorest people in Salvador, with a typical income of \$250 a month.

Gangs routinely confiscate houses in locations they see as strategic and turn them into casas locas ("crazy houses"). If a family refuses to leave, they threaten all its members. In 2017, 296,000 people were displaced because of gang activity. Many escape to stay with relatives elsewhere in the country. But numerous others head north to seek asylum in Mexico or the U.S.

After the failure of the 2012-2013 truce, the idea of negotiating with gangs is taboo. No politician dares advocate for it in public. In private conversations, however, there are many voices among the authorities who are convinced that some form of dialogue is the only way to bring peace to the country. Dialogue must focus on more programs to rehabilitate jailed gang members and care for victims, especially the most vulnerable such as abused women. It also needs to address gang recruitment in poor neighborhoods, which impacts boys as young as twelve and girls are also be targeted at an early age, either to join the gang or to become sex slaves.

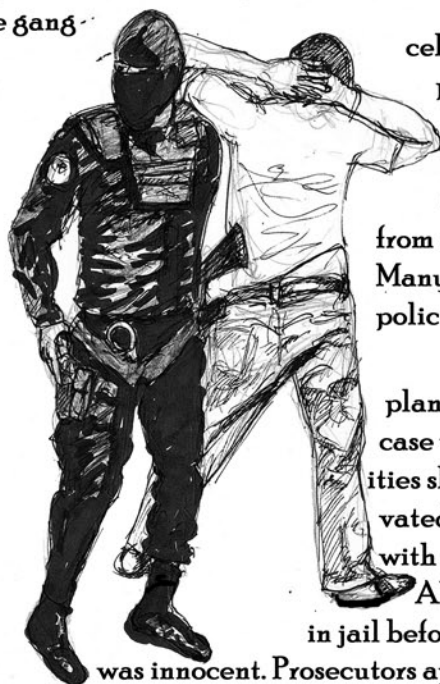
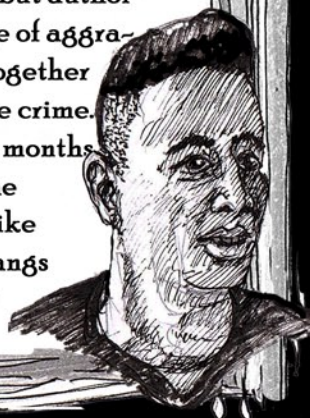
The rate of violent death for women in Salvador is the third highest in the world. In 2016, 524 women were murdered (1 in 5k). Only 5% of the suspects were convicted.

"I am not a part of a gang but the police still routinely harass me. I can't leave the neighborhood because the address on my I.D. will make everyone treat me like I'm in a gang anyway."
-MEIBI-

Poor youth also face violence from police. They are often rounded up on suspicion of being gang members, hassled, imprisoned and in some cases, killed. Shakedowns and cellphone seizures are common. Activists say police regularly plant evidence and rely on flimsy allegations of gang affiliation. Beyond physical violence there is widespread economic and social stigma against people from areas where gangs have a robust presence. Many young Salvadorans now say they fear the police as much as any gang.

In January 2017, police detained, beat and planted marijuana on Daniel Alemán. The drug case was thrown out a month later, but authorities slapped him with a fresh charge of aggravated extortion, lumping his case together with five others accused of the same crime.

Alemán spent one year and five months in jail before a judge ruled in June that he was innocent. Prosecutors appealed his acquittal. Cases like Alemán's show how the social pressure to deliver results in a war on gangs make security forces more likely to double down on victims rather than admit mistakes.



Further complicating

the security of Salvadorans is the presence of roughly 500 private security firms operating in El Salvador with 25,000 personnel (as compared to 20,000 public officers). A report published in March, 2018 by the Washington, DC based think tank the Inter-American Dialogue, found that Latin America's "extractive industries, natural resource projects and agri-business" are some of the region's biggest markets for private security companies. The report found that these companies and officers are virtually unregulated and that the rise in private security firms throughout the region has directly corresponded with increased violence against land and environmental activists. Private security personnel, (mercenaries) in collaboration with public security forces, are often being used to violently repress citizens protesting these extractive industries. These mercenaries have also come under scrutiny for suspected links to the illicit arms trade. In 2011, the government announced that more than 1,700 firearms used by private security companies since 2009 had been sold on the black market after being reported missing. According to the report, 40 percent of illegal firearms in El Salvador are linked to the country's biggest private security companies. This is a major source of weapons for gangs and gives them their advantage in preying on the small business owners who they extort for a living.

According to data from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), of the 106,001 guns recovered by law enforcement as part of a criminal investigation in Mexico from 2011 to 2016 and submitted for tracing, 70 percent were originally purchased from a licensed gun dealer in the United States. These U.S.-linked guns likely represent only a fraction of the total number of guns that cross the southern border, as they only account for those guns that were both recovered by law enforcement during a criminal investigation and submitted to ATF for tracing. Other estimates suggest that close to 213,000 firearms are smuggled across the U.S.-Mexico border each year. According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), nearly half of the U.S. sourced guns recovered in Mexico are long guns, which include high-caliber semi-automatic rifles, such as AK and AR variants.

"Thanks to our lax gun laws, there is little official paper trail, and the weapons (Northern Triangle gangs favor semi-automatic pistols) are cheaper than buying locally". "It's lot easier for me to go to a gun store in the U.S., buy a Glock, and ship it in parts in a microwave oven and have it show up at a relative's house." "I recently helped trace a gun recovered in El Salvador that had been purchased only six days earlier from a licensed dealer near Baltimore." Harry Penate

and the only agent for all of Central America. He served in San Salvador, from June 2012 - March 2017 and was responsible for tracing U.S. guns smuggled into the Northern Triangle.

Harry Penate, was the ATF's Regional Attaché

In January of 2018

the Trump administration decided to end the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) of 186,403 Salvadorans that have lived in the U.S. since a series of devastating earthquakes hit San Salvador in 2001. This decision will cut off an important source of income for Salvadorans. The term used for money sent home from people working abroad is remittances. TPS has allowed Salvadorans to legally work in the U.S. for the past fifteen years. There are a total of 1,352,000

Salvadorans legally working in the U.S. They sent home \$4.57 billion in remittances to family and loved ones in 2016. This represents 17 percent of El Salvador's gross domestic product, and an important flow of income for some of the poorest Salvadorans. They have also become big business for cell phone and credit card companies as well as banks handling the transactions.

The Center for American Progress (CAP) estimates that the cost of deporting all Salvadoran TPS holders who have been contributing to our economy for 15 years is \$1.9 billion dollars (\$10,070 per person). This would end the remittances further impoverishing Salvadorans, while adding nearly 200,000 people to a desperately underemployed population in Salvador.

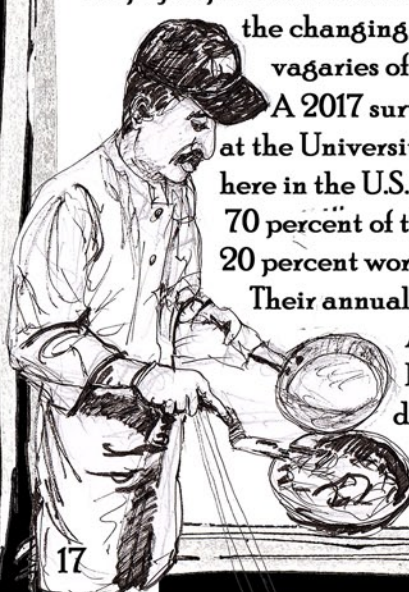
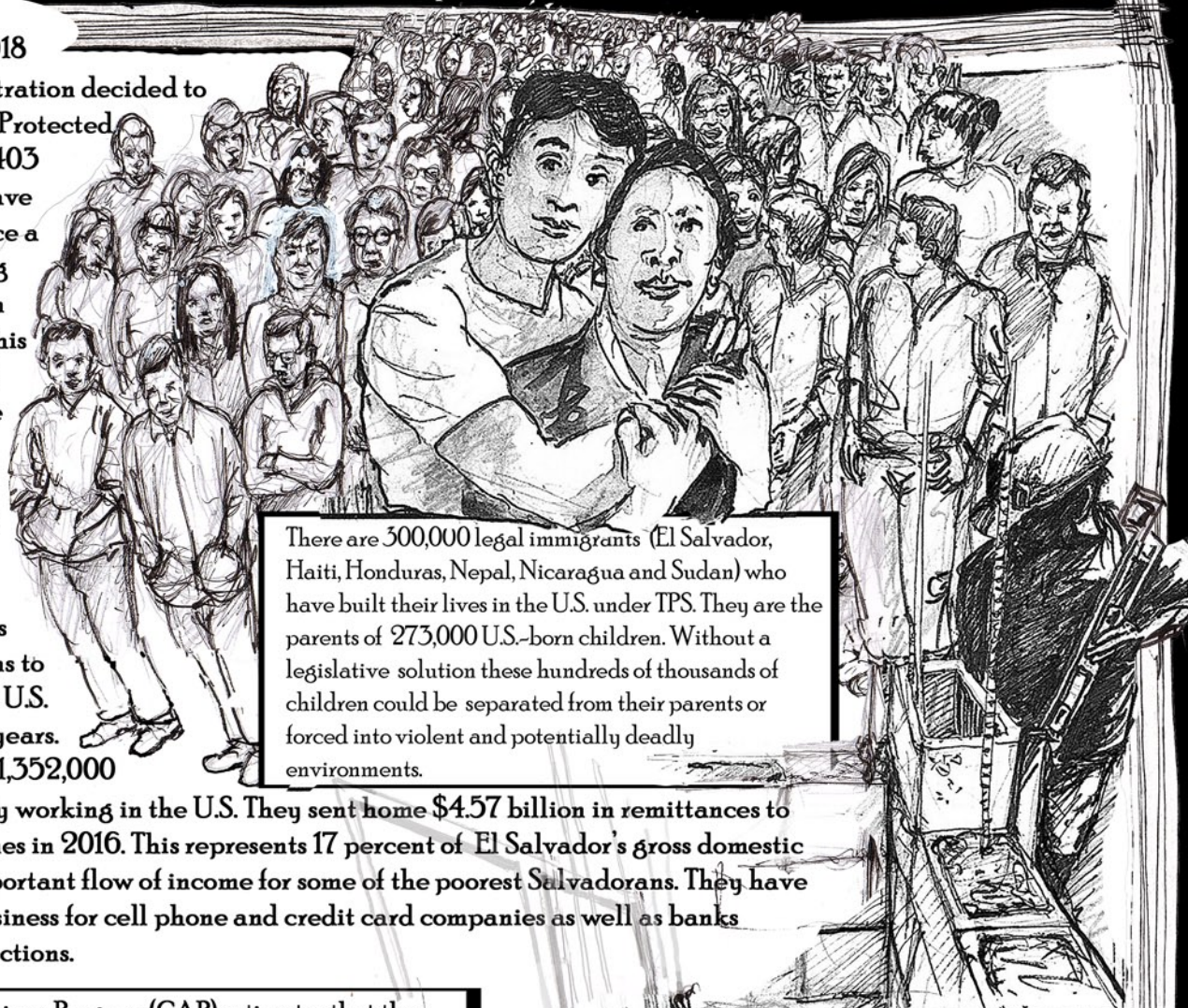
Several studies have shown that as people stay in the U.S., the remittance flow tapers off and as families become reunited through family immigration policy, remittances also fall. This makes some of the most vulnerable Salvadorans deeply dependent on a continuous flow of immigration north, the changing political will of the U.S. and the vagaries of the economy.

A 2017 survey by The Center for Migration Research at the University of Kansas found that Salvadorans living here in the U.S. under TPS are 94 percent employed with about 70 percent of them working more than 40 hours a week and some 20 percent working at more than one job. They pay income and sales taxes. Their annual contribution to Social Security and Medicare is \$481,370,269.

About a tenth of these workers are self employed. Men work in construction/painting, driving, cleaning, cooking, gardening, while women concentrate in cleaning buildings or houses, childcare, cooking or in clothing manufacture.

There are 300,000 legal immigrants (El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Nepal, Nicaragua and Sudan) who have built their lives in the U.S. under TPS. They are the parents of 273,000 U.S.-born children. Without a legislative solution these hundreds of thousands of children could be separated from their parents or forced into violent and potentially deadly environments.

Deporting all Salvadoran, Honduran and Haitian TPS holders would cost taxpayers \$3.1 billion dollars. Ending TPS for these three countries would result in a \$6.9 billion reduction to Social Security and Medicare contributions over a decade and a \$45.2 billion reduction in U.S. gross domestic product over that same period.



This has been a brief history of a country and its people who have suffered unbelievable hardship as a result of contact with European people.

This is the story of one country, but all the countries below the

U.S. border have suffered from the same attitude of

dehumanising disregard for basic security,

dignity and a right to a decent life

free from the threats, of murder, torture

and exploitation. We hold these securities so

dear for our own families, are we not able to

extend this to others in our human family? What

is our contemporary responsibility? We certainly

benefit from this disregard of others, from our morning cup of

coffee to the pajamas we put on at night, our lives are made more

comfortable by the work of their hands. Do we really see billions of times

more value in the lives of wealthy people than we do in the lives of these people who

have had this long struggle to survive? We consistently vote for politicians who advocate

for the rich but never mention these fellow humans who toil at sewing machines, or in

coffee and sugar fields to simply feed themselves.

Their work puts chocolate in our mouths and we send our tax dollars to pacify, crush and negate any attempt they make to hold on to the benefits of their labor. Our

dollars sent as military training and weapons have consistently paid to support the

wealthy in their pursuit of profit and its attendant power. All these bullets, bombs,

helicopters and training in the techniques of brutality are created and promoted

to maintain a system that degrades and dehumanizes all of us, including those

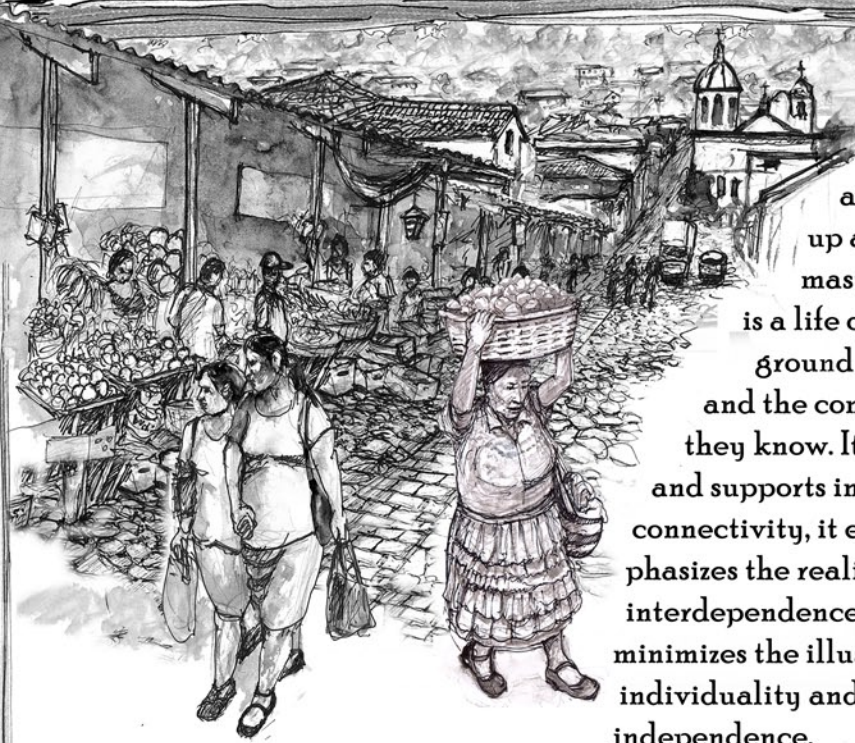
that are aggrandized and pampered by it. There is no proud human life in this, we

are all robbed of dignity by a system that crushes it for so many.

Instead of plowing under and poisoning community farming while exploiting farm workers, couldn't we decide to encourage and support it? Isn't it time to build a world that is much more locally self sufficient in its food supply, but with the modern advantage of being able to move food from over-abundant weather years in one place to crop failures in another? Capitalism supports and subsidizes inequity. Couldn't we instead build

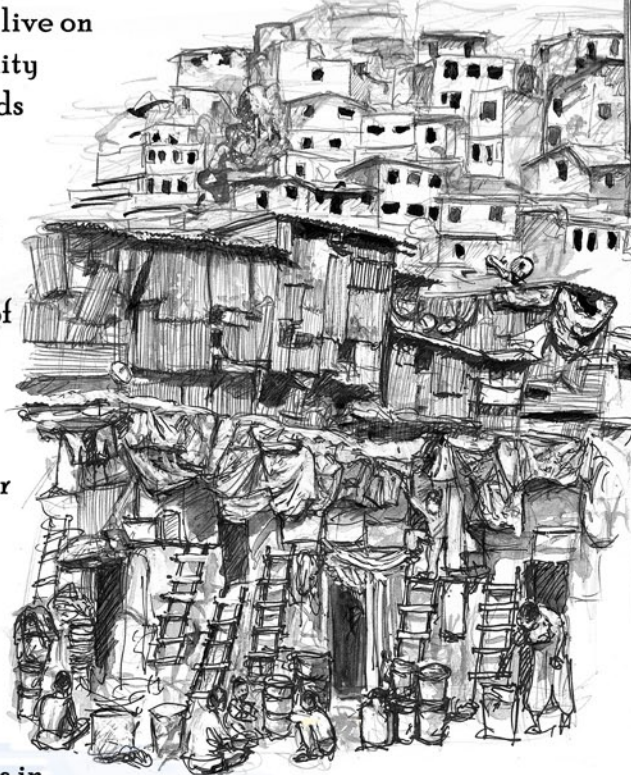
a market system that spreads support out and focuses on fairness and equity? Would it not have been possible for the U.S. government to have said to the fourteen families, we see no practical or moral reason for you to own everything? But we do see how small farmers build resilience in the world food markets and in their own lives. Isn't it possible now to send our efforts towards finding a fair deal for the people making the things we use and prioritize quality food for people rather than luxury for a few?





Throughout these past 500 years many people simply wanted a small piece of ground to raise a family on, a village community and its attended support and the right to hold their heads up and approach others as fellow humans and not masters. It is not asking for an easy life. Small farming is a life of toil, but it is direct, it connects people to the ground they live on and the community they know. It builds and supports inter-connectivity, it emphasizes the reality of interdependence and minimizes the illusion of individuality and independence.

The wealthy didn't get and maintain their wealth because of their individual actions or independence from others, but rather because they take a part of a lot of other people's efforts. Their wealth is in fact completely dependent on this labor. We can create economic systems that recognize the reality of how value is produced, instead of this false idea that the wealthy's efforts are millions or billions of times more valuable than the rest of humanity. Our prioritization of the needs of the rich has moved people out of villages, hometowns and communities and into slums in cities. In the name of progress and modernization people have been forced out of community based subsistence farming and into subsistence wage slavery that recognizes no mutual responsibility and is not connected to any permanent place. Capitalism turns social relations from communities to workplaces, and human labor from food to profit.



In this century we find ourselves with a unique set of problems and assets. The scientific method and the deep understanding it has built of evolutionary connectivity and the underlying inter-dependence of life on this small lovely planet is a huge benefit towards identifying and addressing the threats of the day. But it does seem obvious that our existing power structure and the distorting effect it has on how we view the world is inadequate to face the myriad problems presented by climate change, mass ecological extinction, inequality and the looming violence of war and poverty.

It is time to build new inclusive structures, a media that looks for and builds on commonality rather than the excitement of difference and division, and a governing system that addresses the priorities of the majority rather than those of a tiny minority.

We all want security in our food supply, healthcare, housing, education and the opportunity to work in a system that fairly compensates us for our contributions. This is common ground. All human endeavors are built on the work of a group. The language we speak, the thoughts we think and the actions we take are all part of our society and our history. The natural world has shaped our bodies and our capacities, we are all equally dependent on it for each breath we take. This is the inescapable fact of life. We can create systems of governance that accept this and do not privilege the money-backed voice over the rest of us. Fifty years of neoliberal economics must surely have shown us that tax breaks for the wealthy and austerity for the rest is neither humane or sustainable, and it is brutal, ugly and life destroying. Our current attachment to inequity and hierarchical privilege will destroy the chance for a decent life for our children. Our economic system is eating away the foundations on which it was built - an abundant environment. Without healthy relationships to our environment, from which all of our lives flow, there can be no healthy lives.



I wonder how the world would look if we could hold to a principle of universal human dignity - the belief that all people deserve to be treated with respect for their humanity? Any system that imposes a degradation of human dignity diminishes all people's dignity. Can we be comfortable in our new yoga pants/ jogging top/underwear while knowing of the desperate living conditions for the people who made them?

At the heart of this is how the people are represented in government. If politicians continue to be elected on the basis of how much money they can generate for their campaign and party, there will be no impetus for change. History has shown that wealth will not check itself. There are much more democratic ways of governing. We could build a widespread, blockchain computerized system of opinion polling. So when politicians say, "the American people want this or that" we can actually have some reliable data to check them with. We could deepen our choices with ranked voting systems so we could vote for people that more closely represent our views, even if they are not one of the two most popular (well funded) candidates. These two changes have the potential to broaden and deepen our representative form of governing without violent upheaval. This is based on my believe that when given a choice the majority of people would rather see life get better for all people rather than privileging a few at the expense of most.

Can we now weep for this history? Is it possible to recognize ourselves in these people that show up at our borders? We who have been randomly born in or near power have come so often to feel entitled to its privileges while ignoring the cost that others have paid for our wealth. We are encouraged in this through a process of media-sponsored shortsighted ignorance. Our ignorance makes it easy to blame and fear these people whose random circumstances of birth have placed them in conditions that leave them vulnerable to exploitation and desperate to improve their lives. It is understandable why they might take their children and leave their homes to face thousands of miles of difficulties and danger to get closer to the banquet in hopes they too will find crumbs under the table. It is much harder for me to understand how we who live in the richest, most powerful country in history (as is so often repeated by politicians and pundits) can convince ourselves that we have no responsibility in their fate and have not gained by their impoverishment.





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For reference material see <http://www.davidiles.com/salvadorreference.com>

