



HUMAN RIGHTS IN LATIN AMERICA: THE DEATH SQUADS

Grade: high school

Course: Spanish, social studies

Rationale

Warning: the following lesson involves very disturbing materials and may be inappropriate for your students.

By probing one of the most shocking phenomena of modern times, "Death Squads," students will confront a variety of socio-political issues. Students, in exploring these issues, will grapple with complex questions of human behavior and try to understand the underlying forces involved. Students will learn to find information at various sources, analyze, digest and synthesize the information for presentation. At the end of the lesson, Students will be familiar with various manifestations of death squads, who the victims and perpetrators are, what social forces are involved in this struggle, and how international interests, particularly those of the USA, are affected.

Lesson Overview

Students will divide into groups of 3 or 4 and research human rights issues, particularly the organization and practice of Death Squads, in:

- * El Salvador
- * Colombia
- * Guatemala

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A fourth group will study the United States' reactions to the Death Squads, focusing on two aspects: official U.S. policy and the Sanctuary Movement. This group could be larger or even divided into two groups if desired. More than one group could do the same country, particularly El Salvador, given the vast amount of materials available.

The work will take place both in and out of class and last approximately 3 weeks, at which time the groups will present their findings. Students will be encouraged to use various media in their presentations, including photos, music, video, charts and reports.

Goals

The goals of this lesson are to:

- * explore recent social conflict in Latin America and thereby awaken a lasting interest in Latin American affairs
- * promote critical thinking around the themes of social justice, human rights, fear and power
- * develop Spanish language skills by studying content in the target language
- * provide a project forum by which the student will investigate, analyze and present his/her work

Time Needed

Approximately 3 weeks. Obviously, the lesson could be expanded for up to six weeks if so desired.

Procedures

I have not yet worked out the details of exactly what procedures will be followed. In general we are looking at some time in class to find materials, time in and out of class to read and analyze materials, and time in and out of class to put materials together in a project form.

Follow-up Activities

In this case, follow-up would involve a continued monitoring of human rights events in the selected countries. If the lesson is successful, the student will want to know how events develop in Latin America.

Bibliography

There are hundreds of sources that deal with Death Squads. The Latin American Studies CD-Rom, which compiles documents from the Latin American Data Base, the Hispanic American Periodicals Index, the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, and the Handbook of Latin American Studies (vol. 50 to "present"), lists well over 500 documents containing the key words "death squads". The bulk of those listings are from articles in the Latin American Data Base. The sources presented here are only a working sample of possibilities.

Colombia

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Dermota, Ken. "Colombia Spawns 'Violentology'." *Washington Times*. 15 Nov. 1990: 9A.

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Abstract: Statistics show that violent death is on the decline in Colombia, although it continues to claim some 25,000 lives a year. Both government and nongovernmental figures show that politically motivated murders have decreased since 1992; the group Justice and Peace found the total dropped from 4481 in 1992 to 3772 in 1993.)

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Medina G., Carlos. Autodefensa, Paramilitares y Narcotráfico en Colombia: Origen, Desarrollo y Consolidación: el Caso "Puerto Boyaca". 1st ed. Bogotá: Ed. Documentos Periodísticos, 1990.

NOTICOL: Noticias de Colombia. Access on INTERNET via gopher/Colombia/Universidad de los Andes. Contains month by month updates from Jan. 1994 to present.

Wirpsa, Leslie. "Military Implicated in Massacres: Drug-Cartel Chiefs Also Linked to Colombian Death Squads." *Miami Herald* 23 Jan. 1989: 10A.

"A report by Colombia's Interior Ministry says there are about 140 death squads in the country. These paramilitary groups have been financed and trained by drug traffickers and frequently enjoy the support of military officials."

Yarbro, Stan. "Colombia Right-Wing Violence: Death Squads Seek Negotiations." *Christian Science Monitor*. 18 June 1990: 3.

El Salvador

Archdiocese of San Salvador. *Repression carried out by the National Army of El Salvador, the Military Corps of National Security (National Guard, National Police, Rural Police) and paramilitary organizations (Death Squad, Secret Anti-Communist Army, ORDEN) under the protection of the Christian Democrat military junta. from the period of January 1, 1980 to September 28*, San Salvador, El Salvador: Legal Dept. of the Archdiocese of San Salvador, 1980. (10 leaves; Translated by the Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America.)

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Amnesty International. El Salvador: 'Death Squads'-- A Government Strategy. NY: Amnesty International, 1988.

"This 50 page report summarizes and evaluates a massive quantity of evidence gathered by AI from thousands of case studies. The section titled "Evidence" presents photographs (including those of National Guardsmen engaging in "death squad" activities), and details of testimony from military defectors, survivors of death squad actions, eye witnesses, and government officials." (Central America Update, 26 Jan. 1990)

"The C.I.A.'s El Salvador." *New York Times*. 17 Dec. 1993: A19, A39. (Contradictory and censored versions of first page of CIA report 'El Salvador: Dealing with Death Squads')

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Jamail, Milton Henry, and Loucky, James. "Los Angeles: Tell Pedro So Juan Will Know." *NACLA Report on the Americas* 21.3 (1987): 4-5.

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Weiner, Tim. "Documents assert U.S. trained Salvadorans tied to death squads." *New York Times*. 14 Dec. 1993: A1. (State Department report)

Guatemala

"Americas Watch Calls on President Serrano to End Impunity of Death Squads." Latin America Data Base *Central America Update*, 16 Jan. 1991. RECORD ID: UP011691-0013.

"En el gobierno: No creen en "escuadrones de la muerte'." *Gráfico* 24 June 1990: 5. (Published in Guatemala City, Guatemala)

Freed, Kenneth. "Killing Fields of Guatemala Persist Despite U.S. Effort." *Los Angeles Times* 14 Apr. 1990: 1A, 12A.

"The number of deaths in Guatemala due to political violence is alarming--522 people killed and 200 abducted during 1989. The victims tend to be students, teachers, union leaders, and even physicians who treat the poor. The killings are attributed to independent death squads and military and security forces."

"Guatemala: International Attention Focuses on Human Rights Abuses." *Central America Report*. 17.41 (26 Oct. 1990): 321-322. (Published by Inforpress Centroamericana in Guatemala City, Guatemala)

"Guatemala: University Students Targeted by Death Squads." Latin America Data Base, *Central America Update*, 7 Dec. 1990. RECORD ID: UP120790-0004.

"Guatemala: US Report Attacks Human Rights Record." *Central America Report*. 17.8 (2 Mar. 1990): 60-62. (Published by Inforpress Centroamericana in Guatemala City, Guatemala)

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Sanctuary Movement and the State Department

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"For assistance, or for information on the plight of Central American refugees, contact: Canadian Jesuit Refugee Program, 947 Queen Street East, Toronto, Canada M4M1J9 (Tel.: 416/469-1123); Central

American Refugee Program Program, Casa de los Amigos, 132 Ignacio Mariscal, Mexico D.F. (525/705-0521); Proyecto Libertad, 110A East Jackson, Harlingen, Texas 78550 (512/425-9552)."

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Salvador. film by Oliver Stone. (Only fragments of this film deal directly with death squads and much of the movie is unsuitable for juvenile audiences.)

60 minutes segment aired spring 1995 on wife of Guatemalan guerrilla leader that led to Torricelli scandal.