A VISUAL ESSAY

BLACK

EL SALVATOR

AFRICANS IN EL SALVADOR

AFRICAN PRESENCE IN PRESENT-DAY EL SALVADOR DATES TO SPANISH COLONIZATION. ENSLAVED AFRICANS WORKED IN MINING, AGRICULTURE, AND DOMESTIC SERVICE. OVER TIME, ENSLAVED AND FREE BLACK COMMUNITIES DEVELOPED IN TOWNS INCLUDING SAN MIGUEL, SONSONATE, AND SAN SALVADOR. THEIR EXPERIENCES FORM PART OF THE COUNTRY'S HISTORY, EVEN WHEN NATIONAL NARRATIVES FAIL TO RECOGNIZE THEM.



WHY IS THIS HISTORY DIFFICULT TO FIND?

THE LIMITED RECOGNITION OF AFRO-SALVADORAN HISTORY DOES NOT MEAN AFRICANS WERE ABSENT FROM EL SALVADOR. HISTORICAL RECORDS DOCUMENT THEIR PRESENCE, BUT TRACING INDIVIDUAL LIVES AND COMMUNITIES CAN BE DIFFICULT. RACIAL CLASSIFICATIONS CHANGED, SURVIVING RECORDS ARE LIMITED, AND NATIONAL NARRATIVES OFTEN ABSORBED AFRICAN ANCESTRY INTO A BROADER MESTIZO (*INDIGENOUS + EUROPEAN*) IDENTITY. THESE GAPS AFFECT WHAT WE CAN RECONSTRUCT ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES.

WHO BELONGED IN THE NATIONAL STORY?

FOLLOWING INDEPENDENCE, NATIONAL IDENTITY BECAME INCREASINGLY CENTERED ON THOSE WHO IDENTIFY AS MESTIZO WHILE THOSE WITH AFRICAN ANCESTRY RECEIVED LESS RECOGNITION. HISTORIAN JORGE CUÉLLAR ARGUES THAT THIS NATIONAL STORY POSITIONED BLACKNESS AS SOMETHING FOREIGN, DESPITE THE PRESENCE OF AFRICAN-DESCENDED PEOPLE SINCE THE COLONIAL PERIOD.

REBELLION AND REPRESSION IN 1932



IN JANUARY 1932, INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND RURAL WORKERS IN WESTERN EL SALVADOR ROSE UP AGAINST EXPLOITATION AND THE GOVERNMENT OF MAXIMILIANO HERNÁNDEZ MARTÍNEZ. THE STATE RESPONDED WITH MASS KILLINGS OR LA MATANZA, WHICH MEANS *THE MASSACRE*. CUÉLLAR RESEARCH IDENTIFIES AFRO-SALVADORAN PARTICIPATION IN THE UPRISING, ALTHOUGH LIMITED RECORDS MAKE THEIR SPECIFIC EXPERIENCES HARDER TO EXPAND ON.



Maximiliano Hernández Martínez

RACIAL EXCLUSION BECAME LAW

IN 1933, THE MARTÍNEZ GOVERNMENT ENACTED A MIGRATION LAW THAT PROHIBITED BLACK IMMIGRATION ALONGSIDE RESTRICTIONS TARGETING OTHER GROUPS. THE LAW WOULD REINFORCE THE BELIEF THAT BLACK PEOPLE CAME FROM ELSEWHERE, MAKING THE HISTORY OF BLACK SALVADORANS EASIER TO DENY.



moment she
eath that
with mine

ORGANIZING FOR RECOGNITION

AFRO-SALVADORANS HAVE ORGANIZED TO CHALLENGE EXCLUSION AND STRENGTHEN KNOWLEDGE OF BLACK HISTORY. ORGANIZATIONS INCLUDING AFROOS AND ASOCIACIÓN AZUL ORIGINARIO SUPPORT EDUCATION ABOUT ANCESTRY AND HUMAN RIGHTS. THEIR WORK CREATES OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE TO EXPLORE THEIR ORIGINS AND IDENTIFY THEMSELVES ON THEIR OWN TERMS.

Stop t
about the

MAKING THEIR EXPERIENCES VISIBLE

ARTISTS AND WRITERS ALSO CREATE SPACE FOR AFRO-SALVADORAN EXPERIENCES. FOR INSTANCE, CARLOS LARA ADDRESSES RACISM THROUGH ARTWORK, WHILE CARTOONIST BREENA NUÑEZ EXPLORES AFRO-SALVADORAN IDENTITY AND BELONGING. THEIR WORK CHALLENGES THE ASSUMPTION THAT BLACK PEOPLE ARE ABSENT FROM EL SALVADOR AND MAKES ROOM FOR EXPERIENCES OFTEN EXCLUDED FROM ITS NATIONAL STORY.

SOURCES

CUÉLLAR, JORGE E.
“ELIMINATION/DERACINATION: COLONIAL TERROR, LA MATANZA, AND THE 1930S RACE LAWS IN EL SALVADOR.” AMERICAN INDIAN CULTURE AND RESEARCH JOURNAL 42(2), 2018, PP. 39–56.
DOI: 10.17953/AICRJ.42.2.CUELLAR’

WILLIAMS, KENT C. AFROMESTIZO: THE THIRD ROOT—AFRICAN HERITAGE OF CENTRAL AMERICA. “EL SALVADOR,” 2001.

SIBRIAN, SOFÍA. “LA IMPORTANTE CONTRIBUCIÓN DE LA COMUNIDAD AFRODESCENDIENTE EN EL SALVADOR.” RED PARA EL DESARROLLO TERRITORIAL, AUGUST 31, 2023.

BLACK CENTRAL AMERICAS PROJECT. “SAN MIGUEL.” RESEARCH AND WRITING BY ALLIE SCHLICHT.

