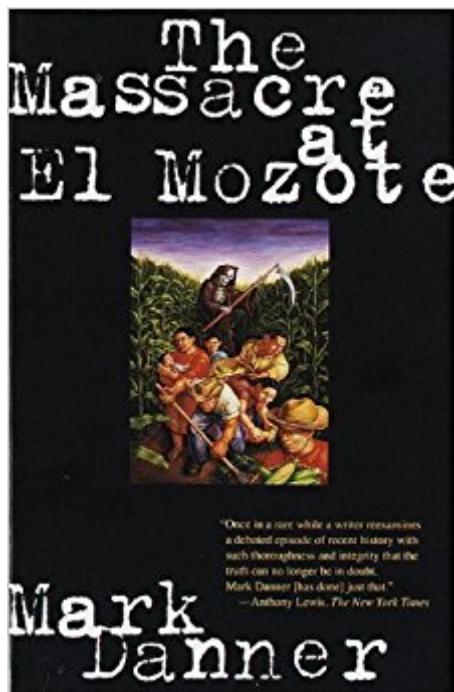


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The Massacre At El Mozote



Synopsis

In December 1981 soldiers of the Salvadoran Army's select, American-trained Atlacatl Battalion entered the village of El Mozote, where they murdered hundreds of men, women, and children, often by decapitation. Although reports of the massacre -- and photographs of its victims -- appeared in the United States, the Reagan administration quickly dismissed them as propaganda. In the end, El Mozote was forgotten. The war in El Salvador continued, with American funding. When Mark Danner's reconstruction of these events first appeared in *The New Yorker*, it sent shock waves through the news media and the American foreign-policy establishment. Now Danner has expanded his report into a brilliant book, adding new material as well as sources. He has produced a masterpiece of scrupulous investigative journalism that is also a testament to the forgotten victims of a neglected theater of the cold war.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Based in large part on his extensive account published in the December 6, 1993, issue of the *New Yorker*, National Magazine Award winner Danner's engrossing study reconstructs events that took place some dozen years before. In December 1981, over 750 men, women and children were killed in El Mozote, El Salvador, and the surrounding hamlets. Although at the time it was covered on the front pages of both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, the reports were not enough to derail Ronald Reagan's push to prove that the El Salvadoran government was "making a concerted and significant effort to comply with internationally recognized human rights." Why the government chose to ignore stories in the nation's two leading newspapers is one part of Danner's sad,

well-researched book. The other is why El Mozote was attacked at all. Populated by evangelical Christians who, unlike Catholic neighbors fed on liberation theology, did not abet the rebel FMLN, the people of El Mozote believed they would be spared when the army decided to wipe out insurgents and their supporters. After several days of brutal rapes and murders, a handful of people managed to escape to the rebels, setting in motion press reports and the under-investigated, coyly couched American embassy reply that allowed the U.S. to continue its massive subsidies. Danner has disinterred an event that is an equal indictment of Salvadoran brutality and American blindness.

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In October 1992, the international community was shocked to hear of the recovery from shallow graves of 25 bodies, all but two of them children, near the ruined church of Santa Catarina in the village of El Mozote, El Salvador. Shortly thereafter, another 100 corpses were discovered elsewhere in the village. After 11 years of investigation, political pressure, and intense lobbying efforts by human rights groups, civil libertarians, and concerned individuals, the truth of what really happened in 1981 in this remote Salvadoran village finally began to emerge, a flashback to the infamous My Lai massacre of the Vietnam War. The situation in El Mozote was similar: villagers caught in the political crossfire between rival groups during a brutal war, trying to remain on friendly terms with their own soldiers while fearing to alienate the opposition. Danner's well-written account, which first appeared in *The New Yorker* and has been expanded here, does a good job of presenting evidence based on eyewitness accounts and reveals the callousness of U.S. Central American policy (the killers were American-trained soldiers of the Salvadoran Army). Especially recommended for Latin American collections.

Philip Y. Blue, Dowling Coll. Lib., Oakdale, N.Y.

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When I was a college student, I majored in Latin American Studies, and many of my classes explored the functions of the military in various Central American countries. In my junior year, I joined up with a bus full of strangers from Austin, and we headed to Georgia for an annual protest designed to force the closure of the School of the Americas (later renamed the Western Hemispheric Institute for Security Cooperation). We gathered early one morning with hundreds of like-minded activists, and we carried small wooden crosses with the names of individuals (all civilians, as far as I know) who had been killed by soldiers trained at this institution. My cross was for Maria Dolores Amaya Claros, Age 5, killed at El Mozote, but I didn't really know many more details about her or what happened at El Mozote. In the ten years or so since the protest, I have

become more moderate in my political views, but every so often, I have thought about that little girl and wondered about the details of what happened to her. I finally decided to buy this book, and I am thankful that I did. Danner writes his account in a journalistic style, giving the reader not just a graphic and nauseating play-by-play of a small group of Salvadoran soldiers storming into a town full of civilians and murdering hundreds of them in gruesome ways, but also a historical context of why the atrocity took place. Danner delves into the ongoing war between the military and the Communist guerrillas, and he highlights the complicated impact of the rumors and facts of the event on the new Reagan Administration in their Cold War efforts. Perhaps the most striking benefit of the book, though, is that the story is quite short - maybe 170 pages, minus full-page photos along the way - but it comes packaged with copies of actual communications and editorials and other documents, including a multi-page list of the hundreds of named victims of this military operation. Although the massacre at El Mozote occurred about thirty years ago, and the book itself is nearly twenty years old, I still highly recommend this book for readers today who are interested in the way that U.S. foreign policy has responded to human rights violations during times of war.

This is a required text for my Modern Latin America course. I find the writing concise and quite readable, which is refreshing in something being used as a history text. I will say that it is quite graphic in its descriptions (as to be expected) but also in its photographic inclusions, so if that is upsetting to you you may want to give it a pass. I appreciate the attention Danner pays to how incredibly easy it was for officials in America to suppress the news reports of the massacre, not as any kind of ill will or theatrical villainy but just out of a 'well someone else can worry about it' sense of self preservation.

In December 1981 the army of El Salvador rounded up over 750 men, women and children who happened to be Evangelical Christians, herded them into a church in the hamlet of El Mozote in remote Morazan Province and killed them all. Why? They were not members of the FMLN who were fighting against them or proponents of Catholic liberation theology. They were apparently killed for no reason except that the army which was trained by its American advisers was totally out of control. The US embassy tried to cover it up, but Mark Danner got the chilling story which was first published in The New Yorker Magazine in 1993, a year after the war ended. This was a massacre in a war that we paid for, but it was covered up by our government. The next time our government wants to start another war, what will your response be? Think about it. Why do we fight? Remember, war is a profitable enterprise for many large American corporations who also own many

members of the US Congress.

I lived in Central America in the 80's but until recently, was not aware of the level of atrocity that prevailed in nearby events and governments. This book is essential and illuminating for all of us who wish to gain a better understanding of how and why the innocent suffer. It is a painstakingly accurate account, which tears at your heart but also convinces you with its faithful attention to detail. The list of victims at the book's conclusion is a simple, yet respectful way of commemorating the immensity of the loss. Even if a victim could only be named: "Female child, daughter of Silvino GÃƒÂmez," the listing still gives honor to the voiceless and provokes the reader to hope for a world where all human beings deserve human rights.

The author does a remarkable job telling the horrific story of this very sad and tragic time in El Salvador. His careful and thorough journalism revealed what American government had tried to cover up. If not for the tenacious efforts of people like Danner, Americans would be led (like naive lemmings) to believe whatever the government wants us to know. However difficult it was to read about the murders and the blatant cover up, I'm glad I took the time to get this book and finish it. It makes me feel empowered to know that there are people out there willing to put their livelihood and lives on the line to expose atrocities for what they really are and expose those responsible. Reading this book has ignited my passion to learn more about current matters of genocide and atrocities of war.

still a classic of investigative journalism. Well worth the read both for content -- justice has still not happened 35 years later -- and for the researching and writing. Danner takes a complex sequence of events and breaks them down.

Great Book!

Needed it for school report, book was in very good shape.

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