



社会中坚

故事片

編劇：亞克爾·威爾遜
導演：赫伯特·畢波爾曼
翻譯：胡一
配音導演：胡一

主要演員：羅索拉·德維斯
瑪·奧特

配音演員：張國燾 于 雷

M i n i n g

Salt *of the* Earth

By James J. Lorence

FOR thirty-five years I have taught American history at the college level, mostly to the sons and daughters of Wisconsin. From the beginning of my teaching career at the University of Wisconsin–Marathon County in Wausau, I have felt privileged to have a job that brings me into daily contact with bright young people who inspire me to be at my best. From my own days as a student at the University of Wisconsin—first in Racine, then in Milwaukee, and finally in Madison—I have always been captivated by the process of intellectual discovery and driven by the excitement of research and writing.

Yet teaching has always been my first love, perhaps because of the unique and formidable challenge it presents. Research and writing are solitary pursuits, but classroom communication is a distinctly interactive enterprise that demands all the energy a teacher can muster. Instead of addressing one's professional colleagues, the classroom teacher is confronted with a frequently passive, sometimes hostile audience. Most of the undergraduates who file into my classroom every fall are there not because of any burning desire to explore historical issues, but rather to fulfill a social science requirement.

I try, of course, to ignite a spark of interest through my own enthusiasm for history, but I recognize that few students will be transformed into history majors, a reality that lends an even greater sense of urgency to my work, especially since this is usually the one opportunity I have to persuade them to love

Although national boycotts kept Salt of the Earth out of U.S. theaters, the film played in China for over fifteen years, as well as in Eastern and Western Europe, the Soviet Union, Central and South America, and Canada. Despite the film's popularity, no profits made their way into the pockets of its creators—the U.S. government blocked earnings from foreign markets.

Courtesy of WCFTR, Film Title Stills

Salt of the Earth (1953) 94 m.
☆☆☆1/2 [Directed by] Herbert Biberman.
... Taut drama about striking New Mexico
mineworkers, with a refreshingly
pro-feminist viewpoint. Director Biberman,
Producer Paul Jarrico, actor [Will] Geer,
and screenwriter Michael Wilson were all
blacklisted when the film was made.

—Leonard Maltin's

1998 Movie & Video Guide

history as I do. In my effort to stoke the fires of inquiry, I am forever looking for tools that will engage my students' attention and enliven classroom discourse.

Long ago my search for the "magic bullet" led me to explore nontraditional sources, including motion pictures produced for the American domestic audience. Convinced that

movies are vivid historical documents that reveal much about the societies in which they are produced and consumed, I developed a course entitled "The Film as Social History" (History 198), which is now taught on several University of Wisconsin campuses. Since the mid-1970s I have selected course topics that lend themselves to analysis through examination of motion pictures as primary sources. For example, I explored the social experience of the Great Depression by exposing students to such films as *Wild Boys of the Road* (1933) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), among others. Similarly, the impact of World War II became clearer to students who studied *Mrs. Miniver* (1942) and *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946). Analyzing the films people viewed at a time when movies meant much to the American public can enhance our understanding of the interests, issues, and concerns of earlier generations. The classroom results have sometimes been remarkable, not only for students, but also for their teacher.

In the late 1980s I chose images of "Communism in American Film Since 1919" as the topic for History 198. As I searched for representative Cold War-era movies, I stumbled onto *Salt of the Earth*, an independent production crafted in 1953–1954 by a disparate collection of Hollywood artists blacklisted by the motion picture industry for communist activity. For those unfamiliar with this dark chapter in Hollywood history, it is important to remember that the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) held hearings in

1947 on the alleged influence of Communists in the motion picture industry. The hearings were followed by the Motion Picture Producers' Association's Waldorf Statement, which declared the industry's intention to deny employment to anyone who advocated the overthrow of the government by force—which referred specifically to Communists and fellow travelers but in practice included left-liberals of all shades. The result was an industry-wide blacklist and a wounded generation of Hollywood artists that included hundreds of men and women—screenwriters, producers, directors, actors, and stagehands—who were unable to find work. Almost overnight these unfortunates found themselves unemployed and unemployable in an industry bent on maiming itself. The damage to the industry was disastrous, whether measured in terms of the motion picture industry's moral collapse or of the subsequent film fare of the 1950s, a bland product shorn of its post-war social comment. For the blacklisted, including some of Hollywood's most talented artists, the result was more than a decade in the wilderness, stigmatized as “un-American” and publicly humiliated. Because of its topic and the circumstances under which it was made, *Salt of the Earth* seemed tailor-made for my class.

The movie caught my students' imaginations from the first showing. Viewing it and studying it as history was a rewarding experience for all of us because of its strikingly modern themes as well as the clear social commitment it revealed. *Salt of the Earth* is set in New Mexico. It is based on the true story of the Empire Zinc strike of the early 1950s, which pitted predominantly Mexican-American Local 890 of the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers against a subsidiary of the New Jersey Zinc Corporation. The film portrays the experiences of a small group of miners who stand up to a company that, despite their hard work and dedication, treats them unfairly. The Mexican-American workers are paid less than their Anglo counterparts, are subjected to far more dangerous situations on the job, and are allowed far fewer amenities in their company-provided housing. They

choose to strike, and despite a corrupt sheriff and seemingly endless resources on the part of the company, these underdogs prevail, largely due to the Mexican-American women's decision to join the picket line.

The strike actually serves as the backdrop to the main plot, the relationship between Esperanza Quintero and her husband Ramón, who have a marriage of love and affection, but not respect. As one of the strike leaders, Ramón is articulate and dynamic, but for all that, the story is Esperanza's to tell. The decision to make the perspective of the film female allows *Salt of the Earth* to transcend other film fare.

What makes *Salt of the Earth* so different is the women's role in changing the outcome of the strike. When the company wins a court injunction barring all miners from picketing, the strike appears to be over. The sheriff has the right to arrest and jail any miners who continue to picket the mine entrance, and without the picket line the way is clear for strikebreakers to return the mine to business as usual. The members of Local 890 immediately meet to decide whether to return to work. It is during this dismal session that one of the women speaks up, alerting the community that the injunction bans only mine *employees* from picketing. A small group of women offer to take up the picket line, deny the strikebreakers access, and keep the strike alive. Despite the objections of many of the men, several women are on the line the next day. Esperanza's growing involvement in the strike, from observer to participant, and her gradual awareness of her own worth as an individual allow her to view herself as an equal to her husband. Their confrontation and the revelation that they experience about their marriage form the true climax of the film.

The militancy of both Esperanza and the real women is doubly impressive when viewed against the background of a male-dominated Hispanic family culture, church opposition, and local community disapproval. Ultimately, the union won modest wage increases, seniority protection for strikers, important fringe benefits, a uniform contract renewal agree-



Courtesy of WCFTR

In the early 1970s Will Geer became known to a generation as the venerable Grandpa Walton on the successful television program The Waltons. Twenty years earlier the entertainment industry had blacklisted him for his refusal to testify before Congress; the part of the pro-company sheriff in Salt was one of the few roles he had during this time. Geer remained a dedicated friend of the workers throughout his life. In 1974 Geer remarked: “Things haven't changed much in twenty-one years. Men who live in New York are still trying to run the lives of people here in Grant County.”



Courtesy of WCFTFTR

In the film, the strike changed gender relations. Before the strike, the union hall had been an exclusive sanctum for men. Here Teresa Vidal rises to address the union meeting. Henrietta Williams, who played Vidal, had been the picket captain during the actual Empire Zinc strike in 1951. Biberman cast in the film many workers who had participated in the 1951 strike.

ment, and an end to the discriminatory “Mexican wage scale.” Their dramatic victory was a landmark in the Chicano struggle for social, economic, and political equality in the Southwest. This story and the film that retold it provide us a record of a civil rights struggle largely ignored by the mainstream media of Cold War America. The strike was marked by the extraordinary acts of ordinary men and women in a real place—a place not very different in some respects from industrial Racine, Wisconsin, where I had grown to maturity.

As a stimulus to class discussion and serious thought, *Salt of the Earth* was a smash hit. When my students and I worked through the film, we learned a great deal about racial discrimination and union organizing. As our focus shifted to the film’s blacklisted creators and their experiences in shooting, processing, and distributing the film, we saw clearly the pervasive influence of domestic anticommunism in the early years of the Cold War and the courage and cowardice that accompanied it.

My classroom experience with *Salt of the Earth* was only

a beginning to the process of inquiry. Intrigued by the film and deeply impressed by my students’ enthusiasm, I resolved to learn more about the origins and production of this important celluloid document. What followed was a voyage of discovery unlike any previous research or learning experience of my academic career. Ultimately it led me to write an entire book entitled *The Suppression of “Salt of the Earth”: How Hollywood, Big Labor, and Politicians Blacklisted a Movie in Cold War America*.

Struggling to stay ahead of my students in our analysis of the film and its historical context, I had turned to the seemingly limitless collections of the Wisconsin Historical Society. Guided by secondary sources to the Society’s Archives division, I discovered the rich collections deposited in the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research, one of the nation’s premier centers for research on motion picture histo-

ry. There I found an array of manuscript holdings relevant to the Hollywood blacklist unmatched anywhere in the United States.

Of greatest immediate interest to me were the papers of Herbert Biberman, director of *Salt of the Earth*, and his wife, the gifted actress Gale Sondergaard. Biberman (1900–1971), a director, stage manager, and erstwhile playwright, was a native Philadelphian whose preblacklist films included *Meet Nero Wolfe* (1936) and *The Master Race* (1944). Sondergaard (1901–1985), the daughter of Danish parents, grew up in Litchfield, Minnesota. By 1947 she had appeared in forty films, including *Anthony Adverse* (1936), for which she won an Oscar. While Biberman had enjoyed only modest successes before the HUAC hearings, Sondergaard’s star was clearly rising when Hollywood leftists came under attack in 1947. Both she and her husband were politically active in the 1930s and 1940s as members of liberal groups such as the Motion Picture Artists’ Democratic Committee for Roosevelt. Biberman was also active in the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League and

in Russian War Relief. He was indeed a member of the Communist Party, and after he adopted a First Amendment defense and refused to answer questions about his political beliefs, he became one of the so-called "Hollywood Ten." He served six months in prison for contempt of Congress in 1951 and was blacklisted throughout the remainder of the decade. A similar ostracization befell Gale Sondergaard after she took the Fifth Amendment before HUAC in 1951. It was a mean season for progressive activists, and this talented couple paid a high price for their political convictions.

As I discovered in their papers, from the time of Biberman's imprisonment onward, Biberman and Sondergaard carried on a literate and revealing correspondence that laid bare the callousness and hypocrisy of the disease that infected Hollywood at the height of the Cold War. Most valuable to my effort to unravel the story of *Salt of the Earth* were the pathos and vulnerability reflected in Biberman's studied effort to reassure his wife and family of the project's ultimate success, from the months of location filming, throughout the prolonged processing of the film, and even as a sweeping boycott of Biberman's Independent Productions Corporation (IPC) condemned the film to a disastrous first run in 1954. Faced with the dismal reality of a total commercial blackout in Detroit and Chicago, he assured his family that if only he could make adequate preparations for an August opening, Detroit "might yet turn out to be a sensational success." Despite his bravado, in his heart Biberman knew that the

For the blacklistees, the result was more than a decade in the wilderness.

"heavy, heavy damage that had been inflicted" meant that he and his colleagues "were through."

While the intimacy and humanness of the personal correspondence drew me into the joys and sorrows of the creative experience, the equally valuable and comprehensive papers of the IPC conveyed a complete picture of *Salt of the Earth* as part of a larger business venture actually intended to break the blacklist. The legal records documenting the company's antitrust suit against the motion picture industry further riveted my attention on the grubby details of censorship as they came to light.

It is the task of the historian to interrogate the sources with probing questions that test the evidence in order to uncover the fullest possible account of events and their underlying causes. In the case of *Salt of the Earth*, the brutal suppression of what seemed a progressive cinematic production immediately raised further questions. Why the assault on this film at this time? Who were its creators, and what were their agendas? What was the relationship between the historical events portrayed on screen and the realities of life experience the film purportedly documented? What were the social and historical contexts for the film? What was the character of the Mexican-American worker community whose struggle for justice was the theme that gave life to the film? It soon became clear that real insight into the troubled history of *Salt of the Earth* would require an intensive effort to understand the worker culture and union history of the Southwest. My task had only begun.

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Members of the Hollywood Ten and their supporters, c. 1950, including Herbert Biberman, director of Salt of the Earth, at far right. Biberman, Hollywood Ten producer Adrian Scott, and producer Paul Jarrico banded together with other blacklisted artists in 1951 and formed the Independent Productions Corporation, which financed the making of Salt of the Earth.

Courtesy of WCFTV

This exploration of worker experiences and organizational struggles was consistent with my ongoing research in labor history, which stretched back to published work on Wisconsin socialism, the Progressive-Farmer-Labor coalition, and the organization of the unemployed. More than that, it touched on deeper personal interests rooted in my family history. During my early years in heavily industrial Racine, the echoes of labor activism were never far from my childhood consciousness. The violence of the strikes at J. I. Case, the charge that Racine was “Little Moscow,” and the looming presence of the ubiquitous CIO had left an indelible imprint on my mind. As the only child in a family grasping at middle-class respectabil-

ity, I was comfortable but always aware of financial pressures I never quite understood, at least until my father’s small manufacturing business succumbed to corporate competition in the 1960s. An experienced machinist too young for retirement, Dad decided on a move to the Fox Valley, where he started at the bottom again as an unskilled millhand. It was there that he embraced unionism, which was to save his job near the end of a long work life. His early brush with corporate power, and his subsequent conversion to the union religion, helped shape my own perception of the harsh competitive struggle.

Nowhere was the raw brutality of economic exploitation

more evident than in isolated Grant County, New Mexico, where Mexican-American workers struggled against workplace discrimination and social segregation comparable to the better-known variety that prevailed in the American South of my youth. Here, the aggressive International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers spread the gospel of democratic industrial unionism among hard-pressed copper and zinc miners who extracted red gold from the parched earth. To the workers of the Southwest, it mattered little that Mine-Mill had been expelled from the CIO in 1950 as a result of alleged Communist leadership and influence. More significant to Grant County miners was the union's commitment to full-community organizing that encompassed the entire fabric of social and economic life. Out of this militant unionism sprang the dramatic Empire Zinc strike of 1950–1952, which provided the story of gender equity and racial solidarity upon which *Salt of the Earth* was based.

From almost the beginning of my research, it became clear that any serious historical analysis of *Salt of the Earth* had to begin with the people themselves and the union they created: Amalgamated Local 890, IUMMSW. Most of the scholarship pertaining to the production and distribution of the film had

focused on the creative experience and the important civil liberties issues its suppression had raised. As a labor historian, however, I was drawn to the historical events that preceded the creative process and helped explain the massive reaction against the completed film. Moreover, I was fascinated by the convergence of interests that made the movie possible—an astonishing collaboration between blackballed unionists and blacklisted Hollywood artists.

Once the fruitful correspondence in the Biberman-Sondergaard collection had whetted my appetite, I realized that multi-archival research was necessary, as were efforts to identify, locate, and interview the surviving members of the original group of unionists that had participated in the making of *Salt of the Earth*. Without access to the relevant manuscripts and key personalities, a full-dress study would not be possible. What followed was two summers and several academic-year breaks devoted to research in distant locations, typically on a shoestring budget and often accompanied by an impatient partner less enthralled than I with reading dead peoples' mail.

One person more than any other opened my eyes to labor's story in the Southwest and led me to the key surviving source persons. Clinton E. Jencks, a battle-scarred veteran of the Cold

Howard Hughes Letter, March 18, 1953

Dear Congressman Jackson:

In your telegram you asked the question, "Is there any action that industry and labor in motion picture field can take to stop completion and release of picture and prevent showing of film here and abroad?"

My answer is, "Yes." There is action which the industry can take to stop completion of this motion picture in the United States. And if the Government will act immediately to prevent the export of the film to some other country where it can be completed, then this picture will not be completed and disseminated throughout the world where the United States will be judged by its content.

According to newspaper reports, photography of this motion picture has been finished at Silver City, N. Mex.

However, completion of photography of a motion picture is only the first step in production.

Before a motion picture can be completed or shown in theaters, an extensive application of certain technical skills and use of a great deal of specialized equipment is absolutely necessary. Herbert Biberman, Paul Jarrico, and their associates working on this picture do not possess these skills or equipment.

If the motion picture industry—not only in Hollywood, but throughout the United States—will refuse to apply these skills, will refuse to furnish this equipment, the picture cannot be completed in this country.

Biberman and Jarrico have already met with refusal where the industry was on its toes. The film processing was being done by Pathe Laboratories, until the first news broke from Silver City.

But the minute Pathe learned the facts, this alert laboratory immediately refused to do any further work on this picture, even though it meant refunding cash paid in advance.

Investigation fails to disclose where the laboratory work is being done now. But it is being done somewhere, by someone, and a great deal more laboratory work will have to be done by someone, before the motion picture can be completed.

Biberman, Jarrico, and their associates cannot succeed in their scheme alone. Before they can complete the picture, they must have the help of the following:

1. Film laboratories.
2. Suppliers of film.
3. Musicians and recording technicians necessary to record music.
4. Technicians who make dissolves, fades, etc.

War era's labor wars, was the most valuable source I encountered in my research. Jencks had spent the decade from 1945 to 1955 immersed in the very real world of the labor movement, and it was he who in 1947 had gone into Grant County, New Mexico, to help organize the Mexican-American community, establish Local 890, and participate in the Empire Zinc Strike. Most important, it was Jencks who had persuaded Paul Jarrico, a screenwriter and aspiring producer for Independent Productions Corporation, to visit Grant County during the strike. After Jarrico returned to Los Angeles, he convinced his colleagues at IPC to make a film based on the struggle he had observed firsthand. Like many of the actual Mexican-American mine workers and their families, Clinton Jencks and his wife Virginia appeared in the film itself; they portrayed the Barneses, characters based upon themselves.

Clinton Jencks was the key that unlocked the door to *Salt of the Earth* from labor's perspective. His list of union veterans and Hollywood figures whom I might approach for their accounts of the events I hoped to describe was invaluable. Moreover, Jencks

Salt of the Earth had become a powerful symbol of the Mexican-American community's drive for human equality.

granted me several lengthy telephone interviews, during which he recounted in remarkable detail the uplifting experiences of men and women, both Chicano and Anglo, who grew together in mutual respect as a result of the bitter Empire Zinc Strike. More depressing, of course, was his dismal story of the intimidation and censorship that marked the production and suppression of *Salt of the Earth*. The decision by the leadership of the various unions involved in the motion picture industry to keep critical technical processing from being completed, coupled with the political posturing of Congressman Donald L. Jackson, made the successful completion of the film a near-miracle. Perhaps the best example of the obstacles the filmmakers faced was the letter written by movie mogul Howard Hughes in response to Jackson's plea for help (see sidebar). Hughes coolly listed possible steps to censorship and intimidation at every level. His letter did not mention deportation of the film's star, Mexican actress Rosaura Revueltas, but the Department of Immigration later did just that, days before the film's shooting was over.

5. Owners and operators of sound re-recording equipment and dubbing rooms.
6. Positive and negative editors and cutters.
7. Laboratories that release prints.

If the picture industry wants to prevent this motion picture from being completed and spread all over the world as a representative product of the United States, then the industry and particularly that segment of the industry listed above, needs only to do the following:

Be alert to the situation.

Investigate thoroughly each applicant for the use of services or equipment.

Refuse to assist the Bibermans and Jarricos in the making of this picture.

Be on guard against work submitted by dummy corporations or third parties.

Appeal to the Congress and the State Department to act immediately to prevent the export of this film to Mexico or anywhere else.

Sincerely,

Howard Hughes

From the *Congressional Record*, March 19, 1953, 83d Cong., 1st Session, p. 2,127, appendix one of *The Suppression of "Salt of the Earth"* by James J. Lorence.



WHS Archives, US MSS 56AN B53 F4, WHI(X3)5174

Frontier magazine featured Congressman Donald L. Jackson's charges of communist influence in the filming of *Salt of the Earth* in 1953. Tipped off about the filming by a New Mexico schoolteacher, Jackson claimed that the film and the Independent Producers Corporation were part of an attempt to undermine the U.S. war effort in Korea. As an active member of HUAC, he urged the film industry to ban the movie from theaters and the government to harass its production and distribution. Shortly after, two Immigration Service officers arrested female lead Mexican actress Rosaura Revueltas on charges that her passport was not properly stamped. Her subsequent incarceration prevented her from completing the picture.



Courtesy of the author

The author, James Lorence, outside the headquarters of Local 890 of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers (better known as Mine-Mill). This local union led the 1951 Empire Zinc strike. In 1967 Mine-Mill was absorbed by the United Steel Workers of America. Until the late 1980s the leadership of USWA tried to suppress the leftist leadership and rank and file of Local 890, but they came to celebrate the militancy and radical heritage of Local 890.

I was acutely aware of Jencks's value as an eyewitness to history, and as I listened to the tale of his personal martyrdom at the hands of the professional anticommunists, it became very difficult to avoid identifying with his cause and even his left politics. And yet, I asked myself, what was radical about his commitment to the struggle for economic equality and social justice in the Southwest? Jencks, this courageous fighter and unparalleled source, personified the historian's dilemma: how to write about people who seemed indeed to be the "salt of the earth" without abandoning the objectivity essential to scholarly analysis.

Not long after my encounter with Clinton Jencks, the trajectory of my research took a rather unexpected turn. During the summer of 1996, I was fortunate to receive a summer research grant that supported two months of reflection and writing within the nurturing intellectual environment provided by the Institute for Research in the Humanities at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. There I set about the task of

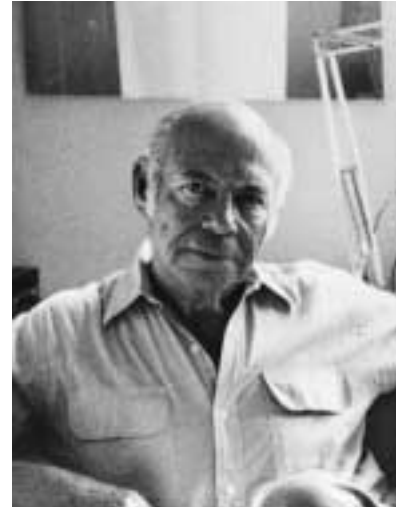


Map by Joel Heiman

Silver City was one of many small, company-controlled mining towns in the Southwest.



Courtesy of WCFTR, Film Title Stills



Courtesy of Lia Benedetti Jarrico

Above: Paul Jarrico, producer of Salt of the Earth, c. 1980. Left: The key figures in the Independent Productions Corporation on location during filming of Salt of the Earth: producer Paul Jarrico (far left), director Herbert Biberman (center, sitting in front of the camera), and screenwriter Michael Wilson (lower right).

writing what I thought was to be a scholarly article on the fate of *Salt of the Earth*. As I began to organize and give structure to my story, Paul S. Boyer, director of the Institute, suggested that the film and its suppression constituted such an important episode in the cultural history of Cold War America that the topic warranted full-dress scholarly treatment—that is, a full-length book. I was of course flattered, but also somewhat hesitant when I considered the amount of work before me. After reviewing my materials, as well as the remaining sources, I threw myself into the task of drafting and redrafting several chapters of a larger manuscript. By this time I had also reviewed thousands of pages of FBI files on *Salt of the Earth* and its director, Herbert Biberman. These materials deepened the base of sources for what emerged by summer’s end as a seven-chapter manuscript.

Paul Boyer observed—and I soon came to agree—that in order to write with authenticity about the Southwest and its people, it would be wise to visit the region where the Empire

Zinc strike and the filming of *Salt of the Earth* had taken place. Consequently, I spent my next spring break in New Mexico.

My Southwestern sojourn was important in several ways. First, I became familiar with the geography and economy of New Mexico’s copper country. No amount of reading could possibly have duplicated the impact of observing the vast open-pit copper mine at Santa Rita, that deep red gash in the earth that gave meaning to Jencks’s assertion that the great pit “gobbled up people” while producing copper “at a cost that we cannot afford.” Even more valuable was meeting at least some of the surviving participants in the strike and filmmaking experiences. Direct contact with union veterans like Virginia Chacón, Arturo Flores, Clinton Jencks, and (later) Alfredo Montoya revealed a deep commitment to Local 890, Mine-Mill, and the union cause more profound than anything to be found in the written record. Moreover, the words of these people and others clarified the strike’s meaning to the



As the Mine-Mill women walk and dance on the picket line during the actual strike of 1951, scab workers (right) watch and attempt to disturb them, with no effect. One woman was hospitalized after an automobile driven by a scab worker struck her. Among the women pictured are picket captain Henrietta Williams (at left); Anita Torrez (in the foreground), and Dolores Jimenez (dancer on left).



Both photos courtesy of Archives, University of Colorado at Boulder Libraries, Western Federation of Miners Box 567

Mexican-American community and to the women of Local 890 as a milestone on the road to racial equality and gender equity.

From these contacts I gained a clearer appreciation of the ways in which the Progressive Party of 1948, various members of the Communist Party, and the militant Asociación Nacional Mexico-Americana (ANMA) played a crucial role in community organizing in the postwar Southwest. It was equally clear that the democratic socialist ideas embraced by some Grant County workers had little to do with the Stalinist “line” or Soviet foreign policy objectives and everything to do with the improvement of the economic and social conditions that confronted them in their daily lives. And it was evident that *Salt of the Earth* had become a powerful symbol of the Mexican-American community’s drive for human equality.

Deeply impressed by what I had learned in New Mexico, I



Courtesy of Archives, University of Colorado at Boulder Libraries,
Western Federation of Miners Box 562

At a time when Hollywood practiced "Jim Crow" segregation, the set of Salt of the Earth was racially integrated.

returned to Madison and the Wisconsin Historical Society to flesh out the details of my story. Supported by a timely fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities, I now revisited these original sources with a new and enhanced appreciation of the film's meaning to the people whose lives it portrays. My travels and interviews had increased my understanding of the miners' struggle, and my manuscript had begun to come together. Now, a final research task involved an effort to perfect my understanding of the artists who had committed their lives and personal fortunes to IPC's proposed end-run around the Hollywood blacklist.

Despite Hollywood's general rejection of *Salt of the Earth* in 1954, it was essential that I explore the sources available in and around the world capital of the movie industry. In preparation for my final manuscript revision, therefore, I ventured West to round out my inquiry into the mysteries of Cold War Hollywood, with a judicious use of the voluminous oral history collections at the University of California at Los Angeles. My study of the papers of screenwriter Michael Wilson advanced my understanding of the creative process immeasurably. Wilson's papers also revealed both the closeness and the tensions of the IPC-IUMMSW relationship through the eyes of Wilson and Jencks, who corresponded regularly in 1953 and 1954.

Yet another perspective on the *Salt* controversy was evident in the records of the Screen Actors Guild, which shed considerable light on the origins of the campaign against the film during

both shooting and production phases. As a result, I was able to resolve at least one of the outstanding questions about the early attack on *Salt of the Earth*: it was clear that executives of the Screen Actors Guild had launched a national publicity campaign against the film by leaking an exclusive story detailing IPC's onsite shooting in New Mexico to the anti-communist labor columnist Victor Riesel in February 1953.

A final link in the chain of explanation fell into place as a result of a fruitful interview with *Salt*'s producer, Paul Jarrico. Jarrico's intellectual presence dominated our conversation as we chatted in his sunny living room in Ojai, California, where he had retreated to rebuild his professional life after a self-imposed exile during the blacklist years. On that day in

October 1997, I learned much about production details and the mechanics of the boycott. Most revealing, however, was his frank treatment of the Communist Party's limited role in the creative process surrounding the film. Jarrico's remarks reinforced my growing perception that the party had, if anything, impeded the production process and, as it turned out, had failed to help the *Salt* group when the opportunity arose. Our conversation was influential in shaping my view that the artists had successfully maintained full control of their intellectual property as they shot and edited their film. I also realized that despite the filmmakers' interaction with communist politics, ultimately, the Communist Party as an official body had no direct creative impact on the film itself. It was at best an uneasy liaison.

After that critical interview I spent four months revising, polishing, and integrating my new research findings into the manuscript. At that point, my work was ready for professional review and, if that proved fruitful, the selection of a publisher.

IN terms of regional, ethnic, and labor studies, University of New Mexico Press appeared the perfect fit for the book. My relationship with their editors was excellent, and by early 1999 the copyedited manuscript had been read, captions written, pagination arranged, galleys proofed, and marketing questionnaires completed. In late spring, eighteen months of feverish work against periodic deadlines ended. *The Suppression of "Salt of the Earth"* was published in October 1999.



Courtesy of Kathleen McElroy, Project Manager of *Esperanza*

Esperanza, the opera based on the movie, had its world premiere in Madison. The Wisconsin State AFL-CIO and the Wisconsin Labor History Society sponsored its production.

In keeping with the goals of the film’s sponsors and creators, the research and writing of *The Suppression of “Salt of the Earth”* was a truly public humanities experience. The public activity surrounding the publication of my book mirrored the universal appeal and enduring quality of its central themes: social justice, racial equality, and sexual liberation. Vivid evidence of the film’s continuing relevance appeared in 1998 when the Wisconsin State AFL-CIO, the Wisconsin Labor History Society, and a group of socially committed creative artists commissioned the writing of *Esperanza* (Hope), an opera based on the Empire Zinc strike. The opera dramatized the worker issues and gender conflicts central to the *Salt of the Earth* story through a blend of musical theater and opera designed to bring a blue-collar message to a wider public audience. Meanwhile, in Hollywood film projects based on *Salt of the Earth* have appeared. In 2001, *One of the Hollywood Ten* was screened on the Starz Channel. The struggle of Local 890, it would seem, contained a message for all seasons. As my students had told me long before, this film, while set in Eisenhower’s America, speaks to us of equality in terms that transcend the generations.

For me the research experience brought many satisfactions: positive early reviews in the press, mixed but intellectu-



Courtesy of WCFTR

This still from Salt of the Earth demonstrates how a strike initially waged over safety issues for male workers was transformed into a struggle to improve the lives of women as well.

Casting Esperanza and Ramón

THE author of *The Suppression of "Salt of the Earth"* describes the critical casting decisions that resulted in hiring a professional actress for the female lead and a local amateur for the male:

It is possible to find in Biberman's agonizing over the lead actor and actress an element of Anglo condescension. Concerned about one Mexican candidate's "authority" and "stature," the troubled director worried that "the choice is so limited here—so very limited." . . . Even Rosaura Revueltas, whose professional credentials were strong, presented problems for a brief time. Although Biberman finally concluded that she "may be very good," his approbation, tinged with unconscious racism, came only after she had "cast off the Spanish sentimentality." Even the dedicated Marxist, it seems, was capable of borderline racist thoughts.

While the Revueltas decision was made in September, the male lead remained a headache until January 1953, when the issue was settled with the selection of Juan Chacón, Local 890's newly elected president. The decision for Chacón was not taken without substantial debate. While Biberman harbored serious doubts, Revueltas and [associate producer] Sonja Dahl Biberman lobbied hard for him. Sonja Biberman saw Chacón as a man who "exuded a certain amount of posture" and "commanded respect." Both she and Revueltas agreed that he could play the role "with great simplicity, but with real understanding of the character." The two women "pushed and pushed"



Courtesy of WCFTR
Herbert Biberman directs Rosaura Revueltas
in her portrayal of Esperanza.

until Biberman reluctantly accepted their advice. . . . Chacón's self confidence became evident in the finished product, in which both lead actors communicate a striking quality of simplicity and dignity, which remain the hallmarks of *Salt of the Earth*.

ally challenging responses from professional peers, public notice not always accorded the professional historian, even unanticipated awards from the Western History Association, the Council for Wisconsin Writers, and Wisconsin Humanities Council. The response to the book was undeniably gratifying and seemed to me reward enough for the five years' hard work and self-discipline I had invested in the project. Even more significant, however, were the lessons in life that were taught me by so many direct contacts with the people and communities about whom I wrote—people who were, in the truest sense, the "salt of the earth." For these people, a labor union was much more than an instrument to achieve greater creature comforts; beyond that, it became an institution that solidified and elevated an entire community. Likewise, the experiences of IPC and the artists who created *Salt of the Earth* reminded me of the fragility of civil liberties and the reality of censorship in Cold War America. In their own way, as critic Barrows Dunham observed in the June 5, 1965,

issue of *The National Guardian*, Jarrico, Wilson, and Biberman were "themselves a portion of the salt of the earth." Ultimately, did their battle against the blacklist matter? One thing is certain: their dissent documents the reality of resistance to the 1950s culture of conformity. In retrospect, the assessment of Simon Lazarus—a financial backer of the film company—resonates with clarity: the battle to make the film and exhibit it in American theaters was, in fact, an "honorable chapter" in recent American history. Thanks to my students, and to the many institutions and individuals who assisted me along the way, it became my privilege to reacquaint modern readers with the *Salt* group's principled struggle for artistic freedom in Cold War America.

Finally, my work on *The Suppression of "Salt of the Earth"* enabled me to contribute in a small way to a cause I have long espoused: the effort to encourage historians and readers to consider seriously the immense value of motion pictures as primary sources. Analysis of the historical context



Courtesy of WCFTR

Juan Chacón, playing Ramón in the film, threatens Esperanza (Rosaura Revueltas) as she declares her equality. Chacón had worked the mine since the age of 18 and had been a veteran of World War II, but he had no acting experience. Biberman called his performance “just incredible.”

As the women walked the picket line, the striking men took up the domestic chores.

Through this forced reversal of gender roles, the male characters gradually became more sensitive to the concerns of their wives and their demands for equality. Although the movie paints a romantic vision of potential gender equality, the women who participated in the strike in 1951 experienced few permanent gains once the strike ended.

Courtesy of WCFTR



for the production of this or any other film testifies to the validity and potential in celluloid documents for enhancing our understanding of history. It was my good fortune to be in a position to exploit the Society's resources with a minimum of inconvenience. In the process, I believe I've grown, as both historian and teacher, by investigating and incorporating new sources in ways I never contemplated as I prepared for a career in history more than forty years ago.

Yet in some respects I've done nothing more than return to the first duty of the historian. The bitter, sometimes heart-breaking struggle between the workers and management of the Empire Zinc Company made a great story—a story well told in a movie entitled *Salt of the Earth*. The raw suppression of that movie was a different kind of story, but it too was a tale worth telling. In the final analysis, we historians are essentially storytellers. As my first graduate school mentor always maintained, "History is literature." ❧

Resources and Further Reading

There are several books about the making of the film *Salt of the Earth*, and readers who are interested in this topic will find Lorence's own book helpful for both its content and its bibliography, which lists books, journals, articles, archival sources, and the extensive resources that the author researched to bring his book to life. For this article in particular, the Biberman-Sondergaard Papers of the Wisconsin Historical Society Archives were instrumental in providing a view into the very personal consequences of blacklisting in Hollywood. The WHS Archives holds the papers of other movie industry artists who were affected, including screenwriters Dalton Trumbo and Albert Maltz.

The labor activism of Clinton E. Jencks, along with his persecution during the 1950s at the hands of the FBI, Justice Department, and Senate Internal Security Committee, is succinctly described in chapter 9 of Ellen Schrecker's *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1998). Jencks gave an interview on November 20, 1993, which is available from the Oral History of the American Left Collection, Series IV, Filmmakers' Tapes and Transcripts, *A Crime to Fit the Punishment* (film), New York, Tamiment Library, Draft 3.

The artifacts of direct intimidation can be found in the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) Archives, *Salt of the Earth* file, located in Los Angeles. Several communications, including memos and telegrams between columnist Victor Riesel and SAG public relations director Buck Harris, are fine examples, especially February 5 and 8, 1953 (telegrams); Harris, "Memo Re Movie Being Produced by Commies at Silver City, New Mexico," February 3, 1953; Harris to Riesel, February 2, 1953. For information about the opera *Esperanza*, the Winter 1999–2000 issue of the newsletter of the *Wisconsin Labor History Society* is helpful. Material on Simon Lazarus, the film's key financial backer, can be found in the Michael Wilson Papers, Los Angeles, Department of Special Collections, Arts Collection, University Research Library, University of California—Los Angeles, Box 48. At the WHS Archives, see the Independent Productions Corporation Papers.

The Author



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Courtesy of WCFTR

In their attempts to suppress the strike, the mining company and local police spared no one, including the children accompanying their picketing mothers. The little actors seen in this movie still were the children of Local 890 activists.

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