



HEROIC

A film by David Zonana

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Teorema presents



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INTERNATIONAL SALES

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SYNOPSIS

Luis, an 18-year-old boy with Indigenous roots, enters the Heroic Military College in hopes of ensuring a better future. There, he encounters a rigid and institutionally violent system designed to turn him into a perfect soldier.



SYNOPSIS

Regardless of the virtues that we all know and value in contemporary Mexico, we can affirm that in our country there is a serious and chronic disease: violence. The reasons are several and can even be traced to the period of the conquest, where many of the racial, social and economic archetypes that haunt us to this day were formed.

Heroic is a film that explores the close relationship between Mexican identity and the normalization of violence, as well as the social and economic catalysts that bring together the necessary ingredients for it to be sustained. All this through symbolism and current realities forged over the centuries.

Luis, like many young Mexicans with a lack of opportunities, seeks economic and social security by enrolling in the Heroic Military College, blindly immersing himself in a hermetic and violent world and gradually being molded by the experiences lived on campus. We see the transformation of an innocent young man in search of his Mexican-Indigenous identity, into a sculpted cadet based on a system of rigid military values, ultimately acquiring the psychological capacity to kill.

The script was based on real stories from former cadets who had the confidence to share their experiences with me – something that deeply affected me and generated interest in learning more about this world, especially about the origins and background of the young people who enter it, as well as their motivations and objectives.

For me it is important to portray this story from their point of view, addressing the cadets as people with families, ambitions, fears and the need to secure their (and sometimes their families) wellbeing in an increasingly complex Mexico, where at the end of the day, the most obvious option for someone to escape situation of marginality and/or poverty, is through structures of violence; either institutional (as is the case of the army), or illegal (drug trafficking). In this sense, Luis' story reflects that of thousands of young Mexicans who choose the military alternative: it is essential to approach the subject objectively in economic, cultural, political and social terms.

The military world is an inherent part of our contemporary Mexico, and there is no doubt that institutional values end up permeating and defining modern societies. Heroic raises crucial social and economic questions, and I consider it vital that these are brought to the table with the intention of exposing issues that we cannot continue to ignore. In a world where violence is growing more and more, do we have the ability to keep our morality intact, or will we bend to become our own worst enemy?

David Zonana

INTERVIEW WITH DAVID ZONANA

1.What was your motivation in telling this complex and often harrowing story? To what extent is it personal ?

I wanted to understand, explore and portray the complex roots of violence in my country: the role of its institutions, social structures, poverty, colonialism, indigenous identity, lack of opportunities and marginalization. It all plays a role and I believe Heroic grasps these ideas. It's as personal as it gets, it is personal to anyone living in modern México.

2.What elements of your film do you feel speak to a nationalistic relevance for Mexican society ?

I believe nationalism is a modern construct that has gained ground as the homogenising western world penetrates the collective psyche. I don't believe any country is just one nation. So whoever wants to place everyone under the umbrella of one flag lacks the ability to recognize a bigger picture, where clearly, history has unfolded in certain ways and has favored certain nations over others, even under the same flag. Heroic tries to address this intricate system through Luis' story: an indigenous boy who will fight and potentially give his life for a nation that doesn't even recognize his own people. Not to mention that he will be fighting the cartels, which are also full of people of indigenous descent. It is all very complex.

3.What are you trying to say about toxic masculinity and the cycle of violence that permeates the military and beyond ?

The military in Mexico, where it is directed to combat its own citizens, is a contradiction: trying to eradicate violence with violence. It's an institution where dehumanization and brutality are encouraged. But then we have to ask ourselves: in how many forms do these values permeate the civil society that it is fighting against?

4.Can you please discuss how you found and worked with your actors ?

The main character, and most of the cast, are real ex-cadets who were enrolled in the military at some point in their lives. In my opinion this gives the film the necessary subtleties it needs to feel truthful. I wanted to take as few liberties as possible. It was part of the responsibility I felt when I chose to speak about a world with this level of secretiveness, about which little or no information is available.

5.Can you please discuss the themes of bullying and corruption in your film. Is this specific to Mexico or an overall statement on society ?

Bullying is an important subject, but also a symptom. For me, the real study should be aimed at the roots, at the system that encourages it and for what reasons. Regarding corruption, I think it is evident that it reigns over almost every human society. It is part of our animal side: prioritizing our own benefit at any cost.

6.Can you speak about your mentors and influences, including Michel Franco ?

Michel was my first contact with the world of cinema and he was also patient enough to share his knowledge and understanding of the language, so I will be always thankful for that. I have had many inspirational figures from many art forms.

7.What does being selected in Sundance mean to you ?

Sundance is a dream for any independent filmmaker. Year after year it has delivered some of the most exciting lineups in the voracious festival circuit, which is not a minor achievement. The market is another one of its strengths. I think the festival has been the best at adapting to the needs of modern cinema and I couldn't be happier to be a part of it.

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY



David Zonana was born in Mexico City in 1989. He has worked as a producer with Teorema (formerly Lucia Films) in films like **600 Miles** (Best First Feature Film at Berlinale 2015), **Chronic** (Palm D'Or for Best Screenplay at Cannes 2015) and **April's Daughters** (Jury Prize at Un Certain Regard, Cannes 2017).

Workforce (2019), his feature film debut, had its World Premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival (Platform Section). It had its European premiere in the Official Selection of the San Sebastian Film Festival. It became the most internationally awarded Mexican film in 2019. It also won Ariel Awards (Mexican Academy Awards) for Best First Feature and Best Actor.

His second feature, **Heroic**, will premiere at Sundance Film Festival 2023 in competition and at Berlin Film Festival 2023 in Panorama Section.

Santiago Sandoval Carbajal

Luis Núñez Rosales

Mónica del Carmen

Yanín

Fernando Cuautle

Eugenio Sierra

Esteban Caicedo

Mario

Isabel Yudice

Andrea



Directed and Written By David Zonana

Produced By Michel Franco, David Zonana, Eréndira Núñez Larios

Co-produced By Jonas Kellagher
Kristina Börjeson

Executive Producers José Nacif, Marco Polo Constandse

Director of Photography Carolina Costa

Editor Oscar Figueroa Jara

Sound Design Erik Clauss

Original Music Murcof

Costume Designer Gabriela Fernández

Production Designer Ivonne Fuentes

Produced By Teorema

Co-produced By Filmadora
CommonGround Pictures
Film I Väst
CTT EXP&RENTALS: Film Equipment Rental

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