

Staging Narratives, Matewan Massacre, 2018 HD Video, 3 channels, 50 mins

Film written and directed by Mathias Kessler

Reenactment actor group directed by Donna Paterino

Produced by Susie Lee

Cinematography by Joan Grossman (Dropcity), Melissa C. O'Brien

Audio by Peter Tooke, Max Philips, and Spencer Ostrander

Editing by Mathias Kessler and Dominik Czaczyk

Special thanks to Donna Paterino and her amazing group of actors who withstood any and all weather conditions, Wilma and Terry Steele, UMWA 1440 and all the great support from the community in Matewan

Historical Background

In the 1920s, mining companies in West Virginia held miners and their families under the yoke of virtually hopeless servitude. Since the turn of the century, a dubious law allowed for a separation between property ownership and the rights to the minerals found on the owner's land; as a result, the mining industry acquired the mining rights of landowners.

Over the past hundred years, the industry has destroyed the region ecologically and economically, more recently through the excessive practice of mountaintop removal mining, which has caused residents to lose their natural landscape.

The Battle of Matewan (also known as the Matewan Massacre) was a shootout between local miners and representatives of the Stone Mountain Coal Company, which took place on May 19, 1920.

During this time, miners were working under extremely unsafe and dismal conditions. They were paid in a type of corporate currency, which could only be used to buy goods sold through company-owned stores.

When the miners organized and went on strike for wage increases, the Stone Mountain Coal Company hired a detective agency to stifle the efforts of the miners' union through deceptive practices and evictions. The miners and their families were driven from the company homes and forced to live in tents on the outskirts of the town, where they were harassed by the hired goons. Triggered by these events, miners and the

detectives working for the coal company became embroiled in a gunfight, which resulted in numerous fatalities.

Matewan Today

In 2010 I travelled to West Virginia for the first time, to further my research on mining and energy-production landscapes. I was studying the historical dimension of *the* labor conflicts in the U.S. and was interested in how common mining methods were directly linked to social and ecological destruction in local communities.

When I arrived in Matewan, I was told about the Matewan Massacre, which is reenacted each year by local community members at the historical site of the battle. The story is much more than a historical retelling; at the same time it reflects the current struggles of the people who reside in the industrially exploited landscape.

I was fascinated with the performative work of reviving the memory of the armed conflict of the 1920s through this annual ritual, and filmed the rehearsals and the dramatic public performance. After getting to know the locals, I've returned every year to film the performance.

Media Collage

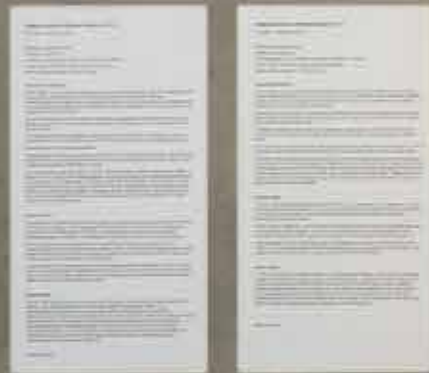
In 1987, a well-known American director John Sayles made *Matewan*, a Hollywood film about the historical struggle of the miners' fight for fair living and working conditions. I combined my own footage of the various performances and rehearsals with material from the John Sayles film to stage a dialogue between multiple depictions of the same story. The different film materials form a media collage, which combines the collective memory of the mining families who experienced the traumatic historical event with the cinematic adaptation by John Sayles. On a formal level, the collage creates a platform in which theatre, film epic, and documentation struggle over the historical truth.



Staging Narratives, Matewan Massacre, 2018, movie poster

Staging Narratives, Matewan Massacre, 2018

Filmstills



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Filmidee und Regie / Film written and directed by: Mathias Kessler

Direktorin der Reenactment Actor Group / Director for reenactment actor group:

Donna Paterino

Produziert von / Produced by: Susie Lee

Kamera / Cinematography: Joan Grossman (Dropcity), Melissa C. O'Brien

Audio: Peter Tooke, Max Philips, Spencer Ostrander

Bearbeitung / Editing: Mathias Kessler, Dominik Czaczyk

Ein besonderer Dank geht an Donna Paterino und ihre erstaunliche Gruppe von Schauspielern, die jedem Wetter standhalten, Wilma und Terry Steele, UMWA 1440 und die grossartige Unterstützung durch die Gemeinde in Matewan. / Thanks, Donna Paterino and her awesome group of actors who withstand any weather, Wilma and Terry Steele, UMWA 1440 and all the amazing support from the community in Matewan.

Schauspielgruppe / Actors:

Sid Hatfield — Eric Simon, CE Lively — Chase Dotson, CC Testerman — Christopher Grey, Ed Chambers — Mark Meadows, Jessie Testerman Hatfield — Ashley Daughtery, Sally Chambers — Jamie Osbourne, Reece Chambers — Billy Taylor, Robert Mullins — Jeff Dixon, Fred Burgraff — Jeff Layne, Charlie Kelley — Joe Chapman, Sarah Kelley — Allie Paxton, Albert Felts — Charles Scott, Lee Felts — Montgomery Scott, 'Tot' Tensley's mother — Donna Paterino

<https://youtu.be/rQ59VPzA9Mw>



Jesse Testerman-Hatfield and Sally Chambers

They speak about their late husbands, and about what it was like to witness all of the bloodshed and death of their partners.



Charlie Kelly and his wife

The couple describes what life was like for miners in Matewan, why they struck, and what the union tent colonies were like.



Cabel Testerman and Ed Chambers

The mayor and the deputy of the town detail what Sid Hatfield did to protect the townspeople and what kind of a person he was.





Sid Hatfield and C.E. Lively

Sid Hatfield, the hero of the reenactment, argues with it's villain, C.E. Lively, over what exactly happened leading up to the massacre.



Albert and Lee Felts

Two brothers working for the Baldwin-Felts agency describe their side of the story, depicting the striking miners as unnecessarily violent and looking for trouble.





Tot's Mother

The mother of a union miner who was killed in the massacre talks about what it was like to lose her child and how amongst all the praise for Sid Hatfield, Tot was her hero.





