

LA City Beat

By Paul Birchall

12/7/06

Phillipe Diaz's informative and powerful documentary is essentially a primer on the civil war in Sierra Leone, at one time considered the "Athens of Africa," but now a hellish landscape of brutal violence, suffering, and corpses. The film, with narration by folk performer Richie Havens, is at times almost unbearably violent to watch – much of the footage is downright stomach-turning and not for the overly sensitive. The screen blisters with scenes of hapless civilians wailing in terror as they are stripped naked, beaten, then shot several times in the stomach and head. There are interviews with mild-mannered villagers who have had their hands or legs chopped off, ostensibly by the rebels fighting President Kabbah's so-called legitimate government (though the deeds could have just as easily been done by government soldiers pretending to be rebels).

But almost as appalling as the violence is the fact that the international community, particularly the U.N., is ultimately complicit in the shame – not because of their inept attempts to stop it, but because their efforts to impose an uneven peace agreement are essentially driven by agendas of corporate corruption and greed. Admittedly, the story Diaz tells is a veritable hornet's nest of confused factions – it's tough to keep track of who's ECOMOG and who's RUF. But, in the end, the irony emerges that the true villains are the outside powers who are either indifferent to the violence or secretly trying to put out the fires with gasoline. (Paul Birchall) (Laemmle's Grande 4z)

<http://www.lacitybeat.com/article.php?id=4719&IssueNum=183>