

So That Men Are Free (1963)

Director: Willard van Dyke  
Production Company: CBS  
Distribution: McGraw-Hill Films  
Executive Producer: Burton Benjamin  
Producer: Isaac Kleinerman  
Script: Earle Luby

Reporter: Charles Kuralt  
Presenter: Walter Cronkite

I'm Walter Cronkite. We take you to one of the remote areas of the world to the high Andes of Peru. CBS News correspondent, Charles Kuralt reporting.

As far as you can see, back there to where the snow begins, is Vicos, a former hacienda 200 miles from Lima, Peru. 2 1/4 miles up in the Andes and just 10 years out of the 16th century.

These are Peruvian Indians, descendants of the once all-powerful Inca whose forebears created a civilization rivaling that of Ancient Egypt, full of a great art that is cherished in museums throughout the world.

Not far from this hacienda are many others where the Indians with the same heritage are serfs willing to bow down their heads in submission to the man who owns or rents them.

If they are unwilling to submit they may starve slowly or they may move to Lima and live in slum shacks on the edge of the city and starve slowly there.

Here at Vicos, the Indians neither submit, nor leave for Lima, nor starve. They hold their heads high, stay and prosper because they have learned something, something which in ten years has carried them from 16th century serfdom to freedom in the 20th.

What they learned is a simple thing, that all sane men are equal, including Indians.

This is our story, "So That Men are Free."

400 years ago a small band of foreigners came into Peruvian valleys like this, speaking a strange language, carrying a foreign ideology, armed with new and decisive weapons, firearms. They found an Indian empire split by political divisions. Within weeks the Spaniard ruled the vast Inca civilization stretching more than 2,000 miles along the mountaintops. The Indian became the Spaniard's serf, rented and sold with the land. Not an American freedom came, but millions of Indians still sit in their mountains waiting for history to begin. At Vicos history has begun, prodded into life by ideas springing directly from the American Revolution.

The seeds came here in the head of an anthropologist, a man usually the observer, not the creator of change.

Dr. Allan Holmberg of Cornell University: The first time I came up here was with a group of students from the university of San Marcos where I was giving a seminar and we came up to do a sort of anthropological survey of the whole area here of the Callejón de Huaylas and one of the members of the party, the photographer, had been to Vicos before and he said "Dr. Holmberg, you must come up and take a look at Vicos because it's one of the most typical Indian haciendas that you'll find anywhere in Peru." People were so afraid of outsiders that at least the women would run as soon as you came into the surroundings. The reason for this I think is that most of their contacts with the people outside have been contacts in which they have come out, you might say, on the short end of the stick.

Vicos a decade ago, a sick man is rubbed with a guinea pig. When the animal dies its entrails will be studied to diagnose the illness. This is 16th century folk medicine, European- not Indian. Vicos was a semi-medieval community and so bitter was life's burden that a dead child was buried with mock joy because it was lucky enough to miss the sorrow of living. Little was left of the Indian heritage.

Now in 1952 Vicos was owned by a nearby charity in a nearby city, rented to the highest bidder. The Indians labored without pay for a patch of land on which to live. In such a society the basic assumption of life is that all men are unequal with the Indian at the bottom, soaking his soul.

Holmberg: Sitting in my office after having spent the summer and part of a year in Vicos with one of my principle collaborators from Peru and with one of my own students, who is now Dr. Mario Vázquez, were sitting in my office after a summer of work and he was telling me about the fact that this company was likely to go broke. So the idea occurred to me and I said to him why don't we take over Vicos and start a program of development of our own where we could both study the process and carry on some development activity at the same time? But I might say there were a lot of unanticipated problems (laughs) in taking over an operation of this kind particularly because we were put in the role of being the patrons by the Indians, you see. They expected us to be typical patrons or probably worse than some of them because we were from the outside and who knew what Gringos might do and they might even be worse than some of the patrons they'd had before.

The link with the Indians would be Dr. Mario Vázquez, Peruvian social scientist, Ph.D., fluent speaker of Quechua, the only language most Indians understood. Cornell would plow back profits from its patron's share of the 30,000 acre hacienda into property accruments. It would pay cash for work and these foreigners would quietly attack the community's docile assumption of inequality with a competing assumption, that any Indian is the equal of any other man. It would be done by endless small actions, not by big speeches, the aim-- to make the community self-healing.

Dr. Holmberg: we wanted to give some sense of dignity and by this I mean a somewhat wider sharing of positive human values rather than such a narrow sharing as it exists heretofore. In other words, a wider sharing of power, the ability to make decisions for yourself which was never possible when the patron was the sole authority on the hacienda. Similarly, a wider sharing of the wealth base than had been the case before because again, the patron held all the wealth and the Indians held very little of the wealth considering the amount of work which they did in this whole hacienda operation. A wider sharing of decent health and well-being if this were possible. A wider sharing of enlightenment. In other words these are the kinds of things that we felt would give a bit of dignity to human life which had never existed here before.

The share of power requires democratic discussion. At the (mondo?) where the feared overseer gave the work orders, the Indians always were silent, stilled by ages of submission. Cornell turned the (mondo?) into a seminar. The former patron's overseer stayed on to help the Yankees run the Indians. Slowly words came out of startled hearts: grievances, questions, then ideas. After centuries, the Indians were talking freely. Their words changed this man's heart: Enrique Luna, overseer.

Senior Luna, today: Before Cornell came I exploited these people for the patron. When Cornell came, it was for me, an awakening. I could see these people, notwithstanding their ignorance, understood as well as I the profound difference between working freely for pay and working only out of fear. Without their knowing it, this changed their way of life. As a former overseer who was sometimes abusive, I came to see the human aspect of this because I, too, am human like them.

Shared power without shared wealth, at least in the form of equal economic opportunity, invited frustration, so Cornell produced an agricultural revolution. A stunted and diseased potato was the main food at Vicos. Cornell urged that this crop have the proper space to

grow. They hinted about better seeds, fertilizer, insecticides and offered these on cheap credit. The Indians were afraid. Only 17 families out of more than 300 dared to try the Gringo magic. But the crops of those who tried, doubled and the practice spread in waves. After 3 years Cornell could stop selling seeds. The Indians were teaching and financing each other and selling their surplus for cash throughout the region. They gained pride by excelling as potato growers. This small technological advance was the great leap for them into the 20th century world of science, commerce, and cash.

Now, more out of gratitude to the Gringos who had cared than out of any deep desire for education, they built a school. Each brick and beam and the labor were provided by the unskilled Vicosinos. Only the glass in the windows, cement, lime, and tiles came from outside. A clinic staffed by Peruvian national health agencies brought the Vicosinos services once available mainly in cities and towns. Children usually worked in the fields. To coax them to school regularly, they got a free lunch, no minor inducement in this still not very affluent society. The Vicosinos began to share a little in the well-being and enlightenment of the modern Peruvian world.

As might be expected, equality for girls took longer. The Indians saw no need for little girls to learn Spanish, to read, to count. They would cook, bear children, work in the fields, do free house labor for the old patrons, weave rough cloth from the wool they spun. But some now learned to make lace which they now sold instead of bought. They were entering the modern marketplace. The whole marriage pattern was changing, too. The Cornell Peru group urged young men to serve their army hitch. Old patrons, anxious to preserve their free labor supply, usually told them to hide in the mountains to evade the draft. The young men return now, speaking Spanish, with new ideas of a wife, a one who can sew modern clothes, things both to wear and to sell. One observer said it is strange but suddenly an industrial revolution has everything to do with the deepest desires of a woman.

With a good school teachers are better and the Peruvian national government has usually cooperated closely with Dr. Holmberg providing teachers, doctors when available, technical assistance. The Vicos school is the best in the region. Boys from here go on to high school in the provincial capital and may someday go to universities. It is not the national government but the absentee landlords, the provincial patrons, who do not care to hear these young voices recite the geometry of the future- to make the change from unequal to equal.

La lingua vertical.. se llame la ligne vertical...todos...

Is this progress threatened?

Enrique Luna: A crisis can come from this valley, the Callejón de Huaylas because the white man thinks only of himself and is accustomed to exploit the Indians. He is afraid that he must plow the land himself and work like an Indian and the Indians might laugh at him. It would be magnificent if a white man would share with an Indian. I am one of those who agrees to this although as a former overseer, I used to punish Vicosinos, even have them arrested for not doing their forced labor, like the Spaniard in colonial days, holding a whip over a man to make him work. The landlord will resist any change. This attitude is strong in the Callejón. Those who wear the neckties are too much accustomed to having this free labor.

The crisis Luna spoke of did come to Huacra, Vicos' next door neighbor. Three fathers of children died here in 1960 because they wanted to plant potatoes on hacienda land. The patron at Huacra, Leoncio Lopez, questioned by Charles Kuralt in Spanish, at Huraz, Peru.

Charles Kuralt: Is it true that 3 Indians were shot dead at your hacienda?

Leoncio Lopez: Yes, and fortunately that is all and 4 others were wounded. However, the families of those who died are still permitted to live on the hacienda without rendering any service or labor whatsoever. The Indians wanted to plant crops on land which was not open to them, which was not assigned to them. When the police came to give protection to me, the Indians attacked us without warning, without provocation.

Charles Kuralt: But the Indians did not have arms, did they?

Leoncio Lopez: They were working on the land and they had their farm implements nearby. The Indians were only 15 meters from the official when they attacked the police. I fled. The police also retreated under cover of their gunfire. This is all I had to do with it because all I did was run from this (?)

Charles Kuralt: Do you think the influence (in Spanish he says propaganda) of the project at Vicos is a real danger to the entire region at Callejón de Huaylas?

Leoncio Lopez: Yes, it is very dangerous. What is happening at Vicos could create a state of mind among the rural population which would lead to an invasion of all the haciendas of the valley. This would throw out of balance, jeopardize agricultural production in the Callejón de Huaylas.

Dr. Mario Vasquez, field director at Vicos: You know there are (is) a strong resistance in the valley against a change in the Indian community, especially from two groups: from the leftist and the conservative people. The leftists think we are working for the imperialismo (imperialist) Yankees and the conservative people, they think we are communists. The (communists?)- they don't like Vicos because the Vicos model-- it will be change (it will change) the whole hacienda situation. They want to keep the Indians like the current situation because they want to make a social movement. They want to use the Indians for the socialist revolution.

But at Vicos, the gentle revolution, the quiet insistence that all men are equal goes on. Counsels are elected. Leaders debate in torrents of free words and act for the community.

The old overseer retired, reluctantly because he now loved Vicos, but gracefully recognizing he was no longer needed. Cornell people say that change has made Enrique Luna a great man.

Enrique Luna: Wherever I go I tell people what Vicos means to me because I, too am also an Indian. I praise the project and try to help it. After all, have I not heard people say the very words: Now we are the masters and we are free. They say this with great pride. And many no longer go to the city to do menial labor for a few pennies. They prefer to stay in Vicos and they say: I do not need that kind of work because now I work my own land.

In 1956 Cornell's lease ended but the Indians, once called the "animal next to man" could now go to a bank, borrow the down-payment on Vicos. The landlords, seeing how profitable the hacienda could be, jacked up the price so the Indians had to rent. In the marketplaces this was still a great success story. Vicosinos now even lent funds to other communities, giving technical assistance in potato-growing to be certain they got their money back. Thus they spread the parable of the potatoes. Cornell's mission was about over.

Dr. Holmberg: Our goals over the years were to see if we couldn't prepare the people-- that is to develop leadership in the community and so on so that, after a reasonable period of time, somewhere between 5 and 10 years, we could prepare these people to assume responsibility, to establish an independent community which they could run themselves. In other words, we wanted to change our role as much as possible from that of patron to that of a friendly consultant who could work himself out of a job after a reasonable period of time. And that, I think we have pretty well have reached at the present time.

The humble vegetable which brought freedom is also the food of the fiestas and this is to be the greatest fiesta in the history of Vicos. A long struggle is ended. The government has expropriated the land from the old landlords. The Vicosinos have bought their hacienda, the first Indians to do so in the history of Peru. This is their day of independence: September 1, 1962-- ten years after the end of their serfdom.

The deed-giving is as much the end of an era for Cornell anthropologists as it is for the Indians. Through the years they have compiled studies of how men must have climbed through centuries to liberty, struggling always to reconcile the competing ideas of equality and

inequality. They have seen minds grow, seen exiles return from the city slums to become leaders. (Salso?) Leon is one of these. The rise of Vicos from starvation to self-generating, self-healing community with a \$20,000 annual cash income is now a model for the U.S. Peace Corps, Peruvian agencies, the United Nations.

Holmberg says if we had the freedom, we could now do it in a thousand communities in 2 or 3 years. Foreign aid is usually expressed in billions but Cornell spent on actual development at Vicos only 5 thousand dollars plus the plowed-back profits from the patron's share of the land. And plus the many, endless gentle, patient hints by word and by deed, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

This fiesta is as different from the drunken bouts of despair Holmberg saw when he first came here as the 16th century is from the 20th. He wanted to give them some sense of dignity, a wider sharing of positive human values. It had been done.

Mestizos, townspeople, even joined in the dancing. Before this, they despised Indians. The truth is, being Mestizo in Peru is not so much race as place. The Indian in modern clothes, speaking Spanish, thinking like a modern Peruvian, becomes Mestizo as European immigrants became American.

The Vicosinos still live in mud huts without plumbing. Better housing comes later, Holmberg says, as it did in our own history. The earth-shaking change has been in their minds. And the parable of the small potatoes could not be complete without the drama of any change in the history of a people. Enrique Luna, whose heart changed, Allan Holmberg, Yankee who cared, are now men of the past.

This is what happened on that day of independence. These are Vicos' own chosen men of the future, Mario Vasquez, social scientist, Peruvian democrat and (Salso?) Leon, wandering laborer who came home from the terrible barriatas of the cities to lead when he heard there was hope at Vicos, when he heard that men were working so that men could be free.