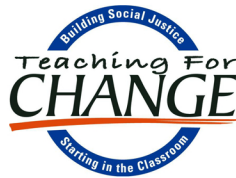


Inside the Volcano: A Curriculum on Nicaragua

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The U.S. in Nicaragua: Timeline

Little of what students read in the newspapers or hear on television about Nicaragua equips them to understand the history of U.S. involvement. Cut off from this important background, actions taken both by Nicaragua and the United States can appear puzzling. This lesson seeks to provide students with an overview of the long and rocky relationship between the two countries. The history sketched in the timeline will be crucial as students grapple with the whys of recent and current U.S. involvement and look for recurring patterns.

Goals/Objectives:

1. Students will learn the outlines of the United States/Nicaragua relationship to the 1979 revolution.
2. Students will consider the causes and consequences of U.S. involvement.

Materials Needed

- Handout #3: **The U.S. in Nicaragua: Timeline**

Time Required

- One to one and a half class periods, homework and follow-up discussion.

Procedure

1. Ask students what they know about U.S. involvement in Nicaragua. List their responses on the board. If they respond with comments like, 'We support the contras,' ask them if they know how long the U.S. has supported the contras. Try to get students to think historically. Even if they have little idea how long the U.S. government has been involved this, too, is important for them to realize. Also, ask students to be cautious with pronouns: if they say 'we' support the contras, were they, in fact, participants in the decision to send military support? And do they wish to identify with all actions of the U.S. government? Whether or not the answer is 'yes', it is important that students come to see this identification as a choice and not as a given.
2. Distribute Handout #3: **The U.S. in Nicaragua: Timeline.**
3. We suggest going over the timeline aloud as students will surely have comments and questions as you review the history. Often, we may not be able to answer all of our students' questions, simply because we don't have the background. But it is also important for students to realize that diplomacy is frequently carried on in secret, so key details of this or that policy or action may not always be known.
4. Here are some questions raised by the timeline:
 - What are some of the attitudes which seem to underlie U.S. involvement in Nicaragua?
 - Besides certain attitudes towards the country, what else seems to motivate U.S. policy in Nicaragua?

- What explanations do you think were offered to citizens in the United States when the U.S. military first intervened in Nicaragua?
 - The group which organized in the early 1960s to overthrow the Somoza dictatorship called itself the Sandinista National Liberation Front. What was the significance of using Augusto Sandino's name in the title of this organization? What might this choice tell you about the group's attitude towards the U.S. presence in Nicaragua?
 - In 1936, the U.S. Minister in Nicaragua reported to the Secretary of State that Somoza was a murderer. Why did the U.S. government continue to support Somoza?
 - One memo about Somoza written in the U.S. embassy in Managua speaks of Somoza's "expressions of friendship" towards the United States. What does this indicate the U.S. government looks for in a "friend"? For his part, why is Somoza so friendly to the United States?
 - In her February 1978 statement, Sally Shelton refers to U.S. military aid to Somoza as providing "a sense of security". What does Shelton mean by "security"? What kind of security did Somoza provide? For whom?
 - Had the State Department followed through on its proposal to send a "peacekeeping" military force to Nicaragua in 1979 what kind of government would likely have been set up? What characteristics would the United States government have wanted in a new Nicaraguan government?
 - What further questions does the timeline leave unanswered about the history of U.S./Nicaraguan relations?
5. Ask students to think about "choice-points" in U.S./Nicaraguan history: times when a different decision could have profoundly changed that history. For example, what if the United States had forced Somoza out of office when our government first learned he was having political opponents murdered? How would this have changed Nicaraguan history? For homework, ask students to list a number of these choice-points and to imagine, in writing, how Nicaragua might have developed had the U.S. government made different decisions.

In follow-up discussion, review some of the choice-points students listed. Ask whether they think the U.S. government considered the same alternatives the students considered. Why or why not? If more U.S. citizens had been aware of events in Nicaragua, what difference might this have made?

This assignment aims to show students that history is not strictly inevitable: at all times there is a range of possible choices with very different outcomes; ordinary people can play a part in influencing decisions.



The United States in Nicaragua: Timeline

1821: Nicaragua and the rest of Central America declare independence from Spain and form a federation: the United Provinces of Central America.

1838: The Central American union is dissolved and Nicaragua becomes a republic.

early 1850s: California gold rush: Lake Nicaragua is a major route for prospectors on their way to the gold fields of California. U.S. shipping magnate Cornelius Vanderbilt constructs a ferry system across Nicaragua.

1850: The United States and Great Britain sign Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, which declares that both nations shall share rights to a trans-Nicaraguan Canal. The Nicaraguan government was not consulted.

1855: William Walker and 58 other Americans arrive in Nicaragua.

1856: Walker has himself “elected” president of Nicaragua. His government is immediately recognized as the legitimate government by the United States. Walker legalizes slavery, which had been abolished in 1824. Walker’s flag carries the inscription “five or none” indicating his quest to spread slavery throughout all of Central America.

1857: Walker is defeated by a combined Central American force.

1867: The United States violates an 1850 treaty with Great Britain and makes an

agreement with Nicaragua granting the U.S. exclusive transit rights across the country.

1909: The Liberal government of Jose Santos Zelaya in Nicaragua defies the United States, negotiates a loan with a British company and opens negotiations with the Japanese over a canal through its territory. The United States backs a revolt against Zelaya. When the revolt looks as though it will fail, U.S. Marines land on the Atlantic coast to save it. Zelaya is overthrown. Conservative General Estrada becomes president. The U.S. commander in Nicaragua writes: “[T]he present government. . . is in power because of United States troops. . .”

Nicaragua agrees to sell a canal zone to the U.S. for \$3 million dollars, though Nicaragua is only allowed to use the money with U.S. consent. Nicaragua is forced to replace British loans with loans from U.S. banks. As “security,” these banks take half the national railroad, full control of customs duties, and the currency system.

1912: President Taft says: “The day is not far distant when three Stars and Stripes at three equidistant points will mark our territory: one at the North Pole, another at the Panama Canal, and the third at the South Pole. The whole hemisphere will be ours in fact as, by virtue of our superiority of race, it already is ours morally.”

Thousands of U.S. Marines and sailors go ashore in Nicaragua to save the Conservative government of Adolfo Diaz. A “legation guard” will remain in Nicaragua for the next thirteen years.

1914: The Nicaraguan government signs Bryan-Chamorro treaty giving the United States exclusive canal rights.

1925: U.S. Marines leave Nicaragua, feeling that the present government is pro-U.S. and stable.

1926: U.S. troops return as attempts are made to oust the pro-U.S. government.

July 1927: An officer in the Nicaraguan military, Augusto Sandino, decides to fight against the U.S. presence and influence in his country. Four hundred men join him in the mountains.

The U.S. sends more Marines to fight Sandino's guerrillas. There is one U.S. soldier for every one hundred people in Nicaragua. Many Nicaraguans join Sandino, others are outraged at the behavior of U.S. troops in the country. One U.S. lieutenant is photographed holding a human head. A Marine Corps historian admits that the Marines shot and abused prisoners, used the "water torture" and mutilated the bodies of their victims. U.S. planes attack Sandino's troops in the first dive-bombings in history.

Sandino says: "We have taken up arms from the love of our country because all other leaders have betrayed it and sold themselves out to the foreigner... What right have foreign troops to call us outlaws and bandits and to say we are the aggressors?... We are no more bandits than was [George] Washington... If their consciences had not become dulled by their scramble for wealth, Americans would not so easily forget the lesson that, sooner or later, every nation, however weak, achieves freedom, and that every abuse of power hastens the destruction of the one who wields it."

Many in the U.S. protest the war in Nicaragua. Protesters are arrested in front of the White House. Petitions are circulated; one national committee collects medical supplies for Sandino and his supporters.

1928: U.S. troops are increased from 2,000 to 6,000.

January 1929: After U.S.-supervised elections, a new president, Moncada, is sworn in. Sandino promises to recognize his presidency and lay down arms if Moncada demands the immediate withdrawal of all U.S. forces from the country. Sandino also insists on a series of reforms: an eight hour day for all workers, equal pay for equal work for women, regulation of child labor and the recognition of workers' right to organize unions.

Moncada ignores Sandino's demands and steps up repression in the country.

U.S. economic involvement in Latin America continues to grow. In 1914 United States companies held 17% of all investments in the region; by 1929 the figure is 40%.

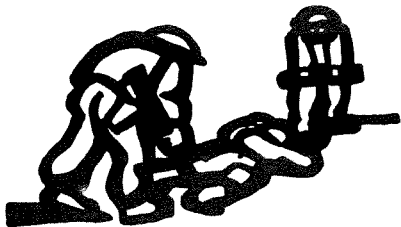


1930: Sandino's support grows as government repression increases and the worldwide Depression brings hard economic times.

1931: The U.S. Minister in Nicaragua worries that Sandino's movement is attaining a "revolutionary character." Nonetheless, opposition to U.S. policies at home and the bad economic conditions in the United States force the government to begin a gradual withdrawal of troops from Nicaragua. But first the U.S. creates a local Nicaraguan military force, the National Guard. It is trained, equipped, and advised by the United States.

1933: A new president, Juan Sacasa, is sworn in. The U.S. military withdraws from Nicaragua, having failed to defeat Sandino. The National Guard's commander, Anastasio Somoza, is selected to carry on the fight. The United States had lost over one hundred marines in fighting Sandino's rebels.

February 21, 1934: Sandino comes to Managua in good faith to negotiate with President Sacasa. Sandino is picked up by Somoza's National Guard and machine-gunned to death in a field. Somoza soon feels confident enough to brag about the murder. He claims it was done with the knowledge of the U.S. Minister in Nicaragua. The U.S. denies involvement, but takes no action against Somoza.



1936: Somoza forces President Sacasa from office and takes over as president after fraudulent elections. Votes for Somoza: 107,000; votes against Somoza: 169. The U.S. Minister reports privately to

Secretary of State Cordell Hull that Somoza is murdering opponents and plundering the country, but is friendly to U.S. investors.

1939: President Roosevelt invites Somoza to the United States. Somoza is greeted personally at the train station by Roosevelt and is treated like royalty. In preparing for the visit Roosevelt was said to comment about Somoza: "He's a sonofabitch, but he's ours."

1941-1945: During World War II Nicaragua produces mahogany for U.S. PT boats and other naval vessels. Other raw materials like rubber and citronella oil are used in the war effort. By mid 1943, 95% of Nicaraguan exports are going to the United States.

The U.S. builds air bases in Managua and Puerto Cabezas as well as a naval base in Corinto, Nicaragua.

Through widespread corruption Somoza is amassing tremendous wealth. By 1944 he personally owns fifty-one cattle ranches. After ten years in office he has become one of the wealthiest men in Latin America, worth an estimated \$120 million.

1947: In another blatantly fraudulent election, Somoza's hand-picked candidate wins. Somoza's National Guard counted the ballots. There was no secret ballot. Those who voted for Somoza's candidate were given a pink card, *la magnifica*, which people carried as a safe-conduct pass.

1952-1954: The U.S. continues to provide lavish military support to Somoza's National Guard. In a memo to the State Department urging more aid, the embassy in Managua wrote: "[Somoza] appears to have an insatiable thirst for money and a considerable love of power. Nevertheless, the Embassy believes in his expressions of friendship for the United States. During the last war he virtually offered to turn this

country over to us. He says (and we believe him), he would do so again... He has repeatedly said that he would do exactly as we say, and we know of nothing in his record that shows any inclination to fail us in international matters.”

1956: Somoza is shot and killed by a young Nicaraguan poet, Rigoberto Lopez Perez. He is succeeded by his elder son, Luis Somoza. Three thousand opponents of the government are rounded up.

1961: President Luis Somoza permits Nicaragua to be used as a staging area for the CIA-sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba.

The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) organizes with the goal of overthrowing the Somoza dictatorship.

1967: At an opposition political rally of 60,000 people in Managua, the National Guard attacks the crowd. Forty are killed and more than one hundred wounded.

Luis Somoza's brother, Anastasio, who had been serving as head of the National Guard takes over as president.

1969: Between 1959 and 1969 foreign investment in Central America rose from \$388 million to \$888 million. In Nicaragua, U.S. corporations account for between 70% and 80% of total foreign investment. In the past decade, U.S. firms have invested in food processing, fisheries, tobacco, textiles, chemicals and pesticides, forest products, packaging, steel rolling and fabrication, oil refining, household goods and ceramics, as well as tourism and banking.

December 23, 1972: A terrible earthquake hits Managua. Perhaps 20,000 or more die, three-quarters of the city's population of 400,000 are left homeless.

Somoza steals millions of dollars of relief money that pours in from around the world.

The Sandinistas begin to attract more support in the cities in response to Somoza's outrages.

1976-1977: As opposition organizing grows, so does Somoza's repression. A letter from the Nicaraguan Bishops' Conference accuses Somoza's regime of "widespread torture, rape and summary execution of civilians." According to the bishops' letter, two mass executions totaling eighty-six civilians, including twenty-nine children, had occurred in the previous weeks.



late 1970s: Half of the entire Nicaraguan population lives on an average yearly per capita income of \$286 dollars.

August 1977: Congress approves \$3.1 million in military sales credits for Somoza for fiscal 1978. The State Department offers assurances that the money will not be released unless human rights abuses are curbed. Somoza lifts the "state of siege" that had been in effect since 1974. This "reform" does not stop the tortures or disappearances, but U.S. military aid is resumed.

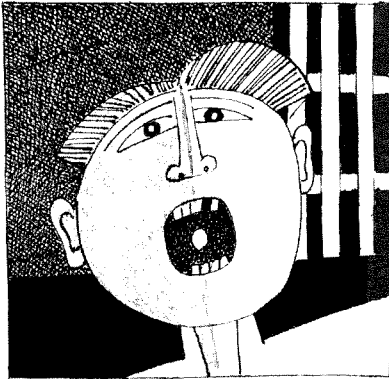
October 1977: The Sandinistas begin a series of coordinated attacks in various regions of the country. Opposition political, business and church leaders call for the complete overthrow of the dictatorship and the inclusion of the Sandinistas in any political solution.

February 1978: State Department official, Sally Shelton, testifies before Congress that continued military aid for Somoza is justified because it helps provide a "sense

of security which is important for social, economic and political developments.”

August and September 1978: With uprisings throughout Nicaragua increasing, the Carter administration appears confused. Some aid is approved, while other money is held up.

In putting down the rebellions, the National Guard kills an estimated 3,000 Nicaraguans.



October 1978: The New York Times reports that the Carter administration has decided to pressure Somoza to resign “to keep reformist elements out of power.” The paper later reports that Carter believes that when Somoza goes, support for the Sandinista guerrillas will disappear. Somoza refuses to resign.

January 1979: Talks break off between the conservative opposition and Somoza. The U.S. shows disapproval by canceling its remaining aid programs and cutting its embassy personnel in half.

May 1979: The U.S. supports a \$65.6 million International Monetary Fund loan for Somoza.

May 29, 1979: The Sandinistas begin their final offensive. A series of coordinated attacks, supported by insurrections in the cities, show tremendous support for the revolution against Somoza.

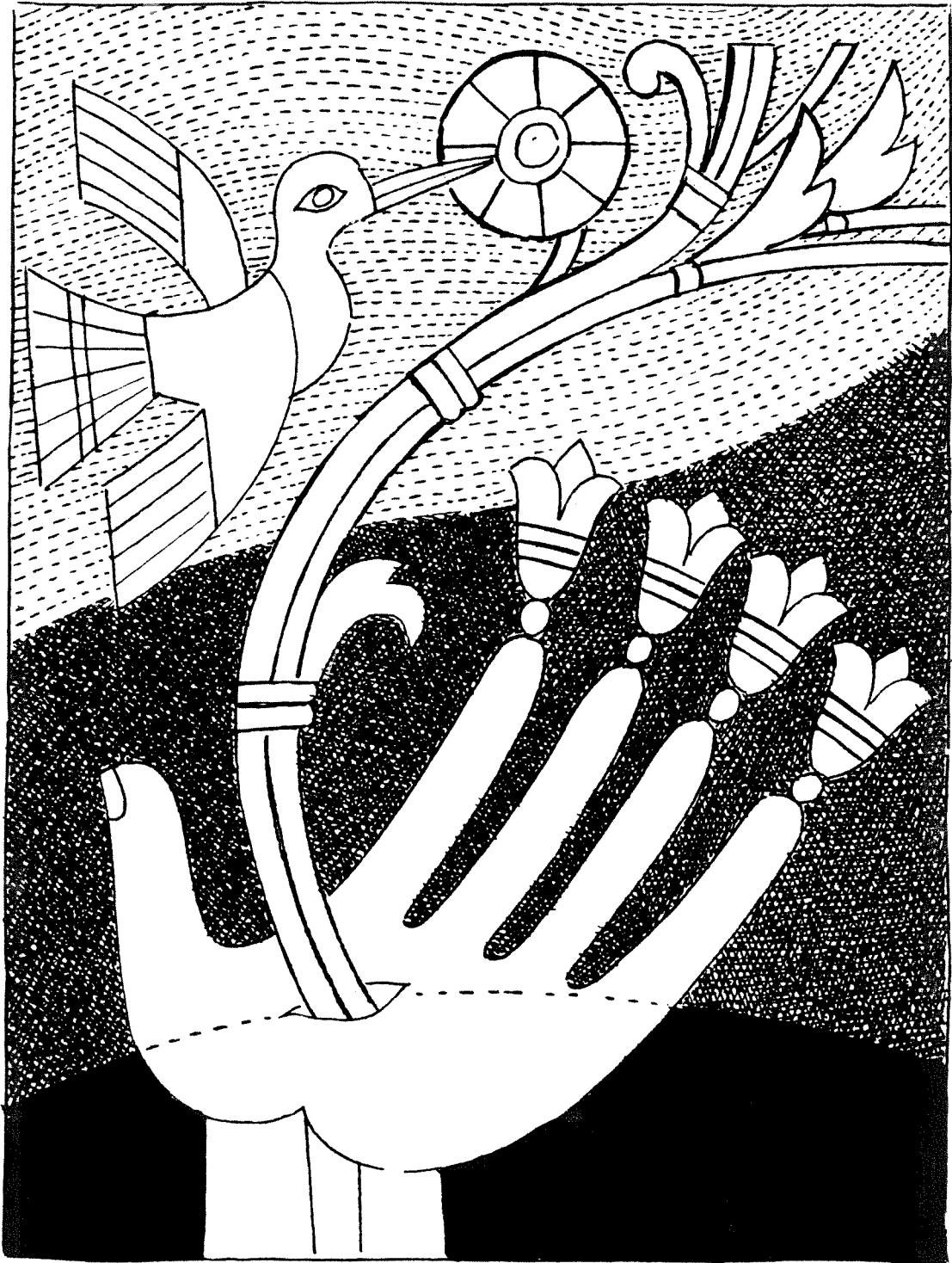
June 1979: The U.S. government fears the Sandinistas coming to power. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance proposes a military intervention in Nicaragua. The U.S. proposes sending an Organization of American States “peacekeeping” force to the country. Panama recognizes the new government the Sandinistas have formed. Mexico opposes outside military intervention. The Sandinistas also oppose OAS intervention. The U.S. fails to get a single OAS member to support its proposal.

July 11, 1979: In Costa Rica, the provisional Sandinista-led Government of National Reconstruction proposes that Somoza resign; all civil rights of National Guard members would be respected; officers and enlisted men not found guilty of “serious crimes against the people” would be allowed to join a new national army.

July 17, 1979: Somoza resigns and leaves for Miami. His successor calls for the Guard to keep fighting the Sandinistas, but it’s too late. After a night of heavy fighting the Guard falls apart; many leave for Honduras.

July 19, 1979: Sandinista guerrilla fighters march into Managua and are greeted by thousands upon thousands of demonstrators.





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