

# History

## Introduction

---

Throughout its history, Nicaragua has suffered from political instability, civil war, poverty, foreign intervention, and natural disasters. Governments since colonial times have been unable to bring stability and sustainable economic growth. Personal and foreign special interests have generally prevailed over the national interests, and foreign intervention in Nicaraguan political and economic affairs, especially by the United States, has resulted in various forms of populist and nationalist reactions and a legacy of suspicion of foreign governments and their motives.

Today, Nicaragua embarks on a new era. In the past thirteen years, the people of Nicaragua have emerged from an era of conflict and unrest into a period of recovery.



The lessons in this section of the *Resource Guide* are structured to provide students with an essential understanding of Nicaragua's rich but often conflict-laden history and to instill an appreciation for the courage and determination of the Nicaraguan people in the face of adversity.

---

# Nicaraguan History: An Overview

---

## Objectives

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:

- identify the major epochs in Nicaraguan history.
  - analyze a timeline to determine the significant turning points in Nicaraguan history.
  - hypothesize about the major issues facing Nicaragua at various points in its history.
- 

## Materials

- Student Handout: **A Timeline of Nicaraguan History**
- 

## Activities

1. Distribute copies of the student handout entitled **A Timeline of Nicaraguan History** to each student and direct students to focus on the first two events in the timeline.
  - a. Ask students to analyze the first event. What does it imply about the indigenous peoples of Nicaragua? (diversity)
  - b. Explain to the class that by the 1500s, there were three principle tribes in the Pacific region (the Niquirano, the Chorotegano, and the Chontal) and that each was governed by a chief, or *cacique*, who, surrounded by his princes, formed the nobility.
  - c. Direct students to focus on the amount of time that separates the first and second events in the timeline.
  - d. Ask students to hypothesize what might have been taking place in Nicaragua during this time period.
  - e. After students have explained their hypotheses, explain that the differences in the origin and level of civilization of these groups led to frequent violent encounters, in which one group would displace whole tribes from their territory.
2. Direct students to examine the events of 1522 and 1524.
  - a. Write the term “conquistadores” on the chalkboard and ask students to guess at its meaning. What does the term imply about the intent of the Spanish in Central America?
  - b. Ask students to hypothesize about why the Spanish conquest would be considered a significant turning point Nicaraguan history.

---

*Continued on next page*

- 
3. Direct students to examine the events between 1821 and 1838.
    - a. Ask students to explain if the events indicate that the Central American region was stable or unstable during this time period. Why?
    - b. Write the term “nationalism” on the chalkboard. Explain that nationalism, a person’s loyalty to and love of his/her country, has to first be based on a sense of shared identity. When does this sense of shared identity begin in Nicaraguan history? In 1838 or with the Spanish conquest?
  4. Direct students to examine the events between 1849 and 1856.
    - a. Ask students to explain if the events indicate that Nicaragua was politically stable or unstable during this time period. Why?
    - b. Refer students to the term “nationalism” written on the chalkboard. How might the Walker Affair have spurred nationalism in Nicaragua? Why would it be considered a significant turning point?
  5. Direct students to examine the events between 1893 and 1925.
    - a. Ask students to explain if the events indicate that Nicaragua was politically stable or unstable during this time period. Why?
    - b. Write the term “imperialism” on the chalkboard. Explain that imperialism is the policy of extending the rule or authority of one nation over another.
    - c. Ask students to explain why Nicaraguans might view American policy in this time period as imperialistic.
    - d. Ask students to explain why American intervention might be considered a significant turning point.
  6. Direct students to examine the events between 1927 and 1936.
    - a. Ask students why Augusto Sandino would be considered a Nicaraguan national hero. What did he accomplish?
    - b. Ask students to explain why the assassination of Sandino and the seizure of power by Anastasio Somoza might be considered turning points in Nicaraguan history.
  7. Direct students to examine the events between 1936 and 1979.
    - a. Ask students to analyze the events listed in this time period and to identify and explain which they consider the most significant turning points and why.
    - b. Ask students to hypothesize why the term “elected” appears in quotation marks in 1936 and 1967. What does this imply? (elections are rigged by the Somoza government)

- 
8. Direct students to examine the events between 1981 and 1990.
    - a. Ask students to describe the relationship between the United States and the Nicaraguan government in this time period. How do they account for the degree of hostility it represents?
    - b. Ask students to hypothesize why the term “elected” appears in quotation marks in 1984. What does this suggest has really changed in Nicaragua since 1967?
    - c. Ask students to analyze the events listed in this time period and to identify and explain which they consider the most significant turning points and why.
  9. Direct students to examine the events between 1990 and 2002.
    - a. Ask students to analyze the events listed in this time period and to identify and explain which they consider the most significant turning points and why.
    - b. Ask students to evaluate these events and to determine, based on the limited data available, what appear to be the biggest challenges facing the current Nicaraguan government.
  10. Concluding Activity
    - a. Ask students to write a reflection, based on their understanding of the timeline, that describes the major issues Nicaragua has faced in the past and how those issues may impact Nicaragua’s future.
    - b. Ask for student volunteers to share and discuss their reflections.
-

## A Timeline of Nicaraguan History

---

6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup>  
centuries

Native American groups begin coming from the North, from different regions of Mexico, and settle in the plains of Nicaragua's Pacific coast: the Chorotegas or Mangués; the Maribios, Nagrandanos or Sutiavas; the Nahuas, Pipiles or Nicaraguas. The Mískitos and Sumos arrive from the South and settle along the Atlantic coast.

1522

A Spanish military expedition, under Gil González Dávila, attempts the conquest of Nicaraguan territory. He encounters resistance from an army of 3,000 warriors, led by their chief, Diriangén. González retreats and travels south to the coast, returning to Panama with large quantities of gold and pearls.

1524

Spanish *conquistadores*, under Francisco Hernandez de Cordoba, impose their control over Nicaragua, controlling and enslaving the indigenous population.

1821

The confederation of Central American provinces proclaims its independence from Spain.

1822

Central American provinces annex themselves to an independent Mexican Empire under General Agustín de Iturbide, later Emperor Agustín I.

1824

Mexico becomes a republic. Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador form the Central American Federation.

1838

Political conflict between federation members increases. Central American Congress allows states to leave the federation. Nicaragua, Honduras, and Costa Rica secede and declare independence.

1849

Nicaragua and the United States negotiate a treaty that gives the United States exclusive rights to a transit route across Nicaragua. Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, an American businessman, negotiates a contract with the Nicaraguan government grants Vanderbilt's company exclusive rights to build a canal across Nicaragua within twelve years.

1853

Conservative General Fruto Chamorro takes over the government and exiles his leading Liberal opponents.

---

*Continued on next page*

- 
- 1856** American mercenary William Walker is hired by the Nicaraguan Liberal Party to topple the Conservative government. He takes control of the government and sets himself up as president. He is ousted the next year, destroying the city of Granada in the process.
- 1893** General José Santos Zelaya is confirmed as president after a revolt by Liberals. Zelaya becomes a dictator who expands coffee production, boosts banana exports, promotes internal development, and modernizes Nicaragua's infrastructure.
- 1909** Civil war erupts. Dictator Jose Santos Zelaya is forced from power (partially due to the landing of 400 U. S. marines in Nicaragua). Chaos and instability follow.
- 1912** Civil war erupts again. 2,700 United States marines land at the ports of Corinto and Bluefields in order to protect American citizens and interests.
- 1916** The Chamorro-Bryan Treaty transforms Nicaragua into a near United States protectorate.
- 1925** President Carlos Solórzano contracts with a retired United States Army Major to establish and train the National Guard.
- 1927** Liberal-Conservative violence continues. General José María Moncada, the leader of the liberal rebels, agrees to the U. S. negotiated Pact of Espino Negro and agrees to disarm. United States forces take over the country's military functions and strengthen the Nicaraguan National Guard. General Augusto Sandino, denouncing United States intervention, refuses to accept the peace accord and leads a guerrilla force against the US Marines.
- 1933** General Anastasio "Tacho" Somoza García is named director of the new "non- partisan" National Guard in Nicaragua. The US Marines withdraw. President Sacasa offers Sandino, who is now a national hero, a general amnesty as well as land and safeguards for him and his guerrilla forces. Sandino agrees to discuss the issues.
- 1934** On February 21, while leaving the presidential palace after a dinner with President Sacasa, Sandino and two of his generals are arrested by National Guard officers acting under Somoza García's instructions and executed.

---

*Continued on next page*

- 
- 1936** Somoza García openly confronts President Sacasa by using military force to displace local government officials loyal to the president and replacing them with close associates. Sacasa resigns and Somoza García is “elected” president by the margin of 107,201 votes to 108, establishing a military dictatorship.
- 1956** Anastasio Somoza García is assassinated. His son, Luis Somoza Debayle retains control of the government while Anastasio “Tachito” Somoza Debayle controls the National Guard.
- 1961** The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) is founded in Nicaragua.
- 1967** Anastasio Somoza Debayle is “elected” President of Nicaragua.
- 1972** An earthquake devastates Managua; Somoza’s mishandling of the crisis and of international relief funds increases resentment of the regime.
- 1979** Somoza is overthrown and a new governing coalition dominated by the FSLN (Sandinistas) assumes power. The revolution has cost the lives of an estimated 50,000 people, with another 150,000 Nicaraguans in exile.
- 1981** The US ends aid to Nicaragua on the basis that Nicaragua, Cuba, and the Soviet Union are supplying arms to Salvadorian rebels.
- 1982** The U.S. House of Representatives passes the Boland Amendment, which prohibits the U.S. from supplying the Nicaraguan Contras (forces opposing the Sandinistas) with arms for overthrowing the Sandinista government.
- 1984** The CIA mines Nicaragua’s harbors in a covert operation, which is universally condemned in the world community. Nicaragua sues the US in the World Court, and in June 1986 the Court finds the US guilty of violating international law.
- 1984** Daniel Ortega, leader of the FSLN, is “elected” president of Nicaragua.
- 1985** U.S. president Ronald Reagan describes the Nicaraguan Contras as “freedom fighters” and initiates economic sanctions against Nicaragua.
- 1986** The Nicaraguan government closes *La Prensa*, an opposition newspaper. The US government announces that, contrary to the Boland Amendment, the US has been providing military aid to the Contras. The supplies were purchased with funds diverted from the sale of US arms to Iran. The covert operation becomes known as the Iran-Contra affair.

---

*Continued on next page*

- 
- 1987** Daniel Ortega, the FSLN leader and President, begins a trip to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe seeking military and economic aid. Peace talks between the Sandinistas and the Contras break down. Ortega confirms rumors that the Soviets plan to supply Nicaragua with more military aid.
- 1988** The Sandinistas and Contras begin a cease-fire.
- 1990** Violeta Barrios Chamorro of the UNO party (National Opposition Union) defeats the FSLN's Daniel Ortega in internationally observed presidential elections. Sandinistas and Contras sign a permanent cease-fire. The Contras begin to demobilize.
- 1993** Rearmed Contras, by then called "re-Contras," take 38 hostages in an attempt to force Humberto Ortega, Daniel Ortega's brother and Chamorro's appointee as chief of the army, to resign. In retaliation, some Sandinista soldiers who had previously been demobilized kidnapped the UNO party's leaders.
- 1995** Humberto Ortega is replaced by Joaquin Lacayo after five years of negotiations with Violeta Chamorro.
- 1997** Arnaldo Aleman is inaugurated as President with around 49 percent of the vote compared to Daniel Ortega's 39 percent, thus completing the first democratic and peaceful transfer of the presidency in Nicaragua's history.
- 1998** Hurricane Mitch, one of the most destructive Atlantic storms on record, hits Nicaragua. 870,000 people, one-fifth of the population, are displaced; 3,000 die and 320,000 are injured. Losses, public and private, are estimated at \$1.3 billion.
- 2001** Enrique Bolanos, vice-president under Arnaldo Aleman, defeats Daniel Ortega in the presidential election. Many Nicaraguans contend U.S. diplomats intervened to block Ortega, suggesting that American aid and investment could dry up in a Nicaragua led by Ortega.
- 2002** Former President Arnaldo Aleman, accused of accused of stealing nearly \$100 million in public funds, is stripped of his immunity from criminal prosecution so that he can stand trial on a variety of corruption charges.
-

# Cultural Diffusion

---

## Objectives

As a result of this lesson students will be able to:

- define and distinguish between cultural diffusion, assimilation and imperialism.
  - label and identify on a world map the different products or ideas that have come to Nicaragua from other parts of the world due to diffusion, assimilation or imperialism.
  - analyze case studies to identify the impact of cultural diffusion, assimilation and imperialism on Nicaragua.
  - interpret the poem “To Roosevelt” and its view of American Imperialism.
- 

## Materials

- Student Handout: **World Map**
  - Student Handout: **Map Questionnaire**
  - Student Handout: **To Roosevelt**
- 

## Activities

1. List the following terms and definitions on the chalkboard:
    - a. **Cultural Diffusion**- The spreading of ideas from one culture to another.
    - b. **Assimilation**-The incorporating of ideas into a culture and making them a part of that culture, often taking on new characteristics.
    - c. **Cultural Imperialism**-Forcing ideas to be incorporated into a culture.
  2. Explain that these three words all deal with the way in which a culture attains ideas, whether by accident or choice (**Cultural Diffusion**), force (**Cultural Imperialism**), or by taking all these ideas and then melding them into your own culture so that they take on characteristics of what was there before (**Assimilation**).
  3. Assign students to work in pairs.
    - a. Distribute the student handouts entitled **World Map** and **Map Questionnaire** to each student.
    - b. Explain that this map is a visual aid showing different products and ideas that came to Nicaragua over time and where they came from.
    - c. Explain that for each of the pictures/symbols on the maps, the students are to identify whether they think it came by diffusion or imperialism and to answer the questions that follow.
- 

*Continued on next page*

**Activities  
(continued)**

4. After the pairs have completed the **Map Questionnaire**, review each item on the worksheet and ask the following questions to generate discussion:
    - a. Who were the transmitters of this idea? Was it conquistadors, media, travelers, neighboring countries, immigration etc.?
    - b. How does someone force an idea upon someone? What measures might they take?
    - c. Do you think the natives of Nicaragua wanted any of these products or ideas originally? Would any be beneficial?
    - d. How would you feel if someone forced you to believe something you didn't know? Eat something you didn't want to eat?
  5. Distribute the student handout entitled "**To Roosevelt**."
    - a. Explain to the class that Theodore Roosevelt was president of the United States from 1901 – 1909 and that during this time period the United States was carving out a sphere-of-influence in Central America, which included the development of the Panama Canal.
    - b. Ask for student volunteers to read the poem aloud.
    - c. Following the reading, provoke discussion by asking the following questions:
      - What is the mood set by the author of this poem?
      - What is the author saying when he talks about the United States and "our America, Spanish America"? What is the difference?
      - What does the author say about the United States?
      - What does the author say about Spanish America? What are its characteristics?
      - What words does the author say that evokes nationalism and patriotism?
      - How do you think the author feels about President Roosevelt?
      - What would Roosevelt have to be able to do to manage to "manage to grab us in your iron claws"?
      - Is this poem pro- or anti-imperialism? Why?
-

# The World



## Map Questionnaire

---

1. Were these products/ideas spread by diffusion or by imperialism?

Roman Catholic Religion \_\_\_\_\_

Rice \_\_\_\_\_

Disease \_\_\_\_\_

Sugar cane \_\_\_\_\_

Coffee \_\_\_\_\_

Horses \_\_\_\_\_

Exotic spices/salt \_\_\_\_\_

Tea \_\_\_\_\_

---

2. What products were brought over by the Columbian exchange to Nicaragua?  
List these and draw a symbol for these items below.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

---

3. What items/ideas has our culture assimilated from another culture?

---

# “To Roosevelt”

by Rubén Darío

---

The United States is potent and great.  
When you shake there is a deep tremblor  
that passes through the enormous vertebrae of the Andes.  
If you clamor, it is heard like the roaring of a lion.  
Hugo already said it to Grant: The stars are yours.  
(The Argentine sun, ascending, barely shines,  
and the Chilean star rises...) You are rich.  
You join the cult of Hercules to the cult of Mammon,  
and illuminating the road of easy conquest,  
Liberty raises its torch in New York.

But our America, that has had poets  
since the ancient times of Netzahualcoyotl,  
that has walked in the footprints of great Bacchus  
who learned Pan's alphabet at once;  
that consulted the stars, that knew Atlantis  
whose resounding name comes to us from Plato,  
that since the remote times of its life  
has lived on light, on fire, on perfume, on love,  
America of the great Montezuma, of the Inca  
the fragrant America of Christopher Columbus,  
Catholic America, Spanish America,  
The America in which noble Cuauhtemoc said:  
“I'm not in a bed of roses”; the America  
that trembles in hurricanes and lives on love,  
it lives, you men of Saxon eyes and barbarous soul.  
And it dreams; and it loves, and it vibrates, and it is the daughter of the Sun.  
Be careful. Viva Spanish America!  
Roosevelt, one would have to be, through God himself,  
the fearful Rifleman and strong Hunter,  
to manage to grab us in your iron claws

---

# In the Shadow of the Giant

---

## Objectives

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:

- analyze the origins of political instability in Nicaragua in the 19th and early 20th centuries.
  - evaluate the impact of American intervention in Nicaragua.
  - evaluate the importance of Augusto César Sandino in Nicaraguan history and mythology.
- 

## Materials

- Student Handout: **Nicaragua and the United States**
- 

## Activities

1. Distribute the student handout entitled **Nicaragua and the United States**.
    - a. Direct students to read the first section entitled *The Walker Affair*.
    - b. Ask students to evaluate the condition of Nicaragua as described in the first paragraph. Does it appear to be politically stable or unstable? Why?
    - c. Ask students to evaluate Walker's role in Nicaragua. Why do Nicaraguans still celebrate their victory over Walker? What does he symbolize?
  2. Write the phrase "Monroe Doctrine" on the chalkboard.
    - a. Ask students to recall what they know of the Monroe Doctrine.
    - b. Explain that the Monroe Doctrine is a cornerstone of American foreign policy. Issued in 1823, it declared that the United States would protect the Western Hemisphere from any intervention by the European Powers.
    - c. Write the following statement by Secretary of State Richard Olney (1895) on the chalkboard or display it on an overhead transparency: "To-day the United States is practically sovereign on this continent, and its fiat is law upon the subjects to which it confines its interposition."
    - d. Ask the class to interpret the implication of Olney's statement. What is he claiming? What is the meaning of the phrase "its fiat is law?"
  3. Direct students to read the first three paragraphs in the section entitled *The Roosevelt Corollary*.
    - a. Direct the attention of students to President Roosevelt's quote. What does the phrase "international police power" imply?
- 

*Continued on next page*

- 
- b. Ask students to explain how the Roosevelt Corollary was implemented in Nicaragua to remove José Santos Zelaya from power. What does his removal imply about American intentions in Nicaragua?
  4. Direct students to read the section entitled *Dollar Diplomacy*.
    - a. Ask students to summarize the basic principles of dollar diplomacy.
    - b. Write the word “sovereignty” on the chalkboard and explain that in order to be truly independent a nation-state must have exclusive control (sovereignty) over its own territory.
    - c. Ask students to assess the relationship between Nicaragua and the United States during the time period of dollar diplomacy. Did Nicaragua really possess sovereignty over its territory? Why or why not?
    - d. Ask students to hypothesize why, as stated by the U. S. envoy, “the natural sentiment of the overwhelming majority of Nicaraguans is antagonistic to the United States.”
  5. Direct students to read the section entitled *Augusto César Sandino*.
    - a. Direct students to focus on President Coolidge’s remark in the first paragraph.
      - What does it imply about the relationship between Nicaragua and the United States?
      - How did the Nicaraguan view differ?
      - How do you account for this difference?
    - b. Ask students to explain why Sandino is considered Nicaragua’s national hero. What did he achieve? What do his effort symbolize?
  6. Concluding Activity  
Direct students to write a short essay in response to the following question:  
“Webster’s Dictionary defines imperialism as ‘the policy of extending the rule or authority of an empire or nation over foreign countries.’ Based on that definition, can U.S. policy toward Nicaragua before 1933 be classified as imperialistic in nature? Why or why not?”
-

## Nicaragua and the United States

---

### The Walker Affair



***La Battalla de  
San Jacinto*** by  
**Amilcar  
Mendieta**



**Granada “1855  
– 1857”** by **Luis  
Abarado**

Nicaragua won its independence in stages: first as a part of the Mexican empire of Agustin de Iturbide in 1822, then as a member of the Central American Federation in 1823, and finally as an individual sovereign state in 1838. Throughout this period, the Leonese, who eventually came to call themselves Liberals, and the Granadinos, who championed the Conservative cause, squabbled and fought with each other over the control of their country. After 1838, the chaos and interregional warfare intensified. Presidents came and went as one group or the other imposed temporary control.

In 1854, the Liberals, who were at the time losing in a struggle to unseat the Conservatives, turned for help to a San Francisco-based soldier of fortune named William Walker. Walker sailed in June 1855 from California to Nicaragua with a small band of armed Californians. After some initial military setbacks he and his Liberal allies took Granada in October and set up a coalition government under a Conservative, Patricio Rivas. Almost from the start, the real power in the government was Walker himself, who rapidly began to implement a series of ideas that included the encouragement of foreign investment and the increased exploitation of Nicaraguan resources. In July 1856, Walker formally took over the presidency. He planned to use the city of Granada as a base to build a Central American empire.

Many Nicaraguans of both parties became increasingly alarmed at the foreign takeover of their country. This was especially true in 1856 when Walker, the dictator-president, legalized slavery and declared English to be the official language. As a result, it was not long before the onset of a war in which Nicaraguans of both parties and, at one time or another, troops from all of the Central American republics fought against the hated foreigners. Walker’s forces were finally forced to flee from Granada. Before doing so, his men set fire to the city, and one of them left behind a sign reading “Here was Granada.” Most of the city was destroyed.

In the spring of 1857, the U.S. government intervened to arrange a truce and to allow Walker to surrender and leave Nicaragua. (Walker returned to Central America in yet another filibustering attempt in 1860, but he was captured by the British and turned over to the Hondurans, who quickly tried him and put him before a firing squad.) So important is the war against Walker in Nicaraguan patriotic lore that the independence day that *nicas* celebrate on September 14 is a commemoration of a decisive battle at San Jacinto against Walker and his troops.

---

*Continued on next page*

---

**The Roosevelt  
Corollary**

U.S. expansion to the Pacific coast of North America and the discovery of gold in California stimulated intense U.S. interest in Nicaragua as the site for an interoceanic transit route. However, Great Britain also had developed an interest in doing the same. In 1850 the two countries attempted to diffuse the potential for conflict by signing the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty stipulating that any isthmian canal would be a joint venture. Following the Spanish-American War, the United States set out to modify the treaty. The end result was the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty that essentially gave the United States a green light to construct a canal.

In 1901, the Isthmian Canal Commission reported in favor of Nicaragua over Panama, and in 1902 Congress passed the Hepburn Bill authorizing a canal through Nicaragua. Thanks to a strong lobbying campaign by Phillipe Buneau-Varilla representing the interests of the New Panama Canal Company, the Commission reversed itself and decided for the technologically preferable Panama passage. Congress finally chose the Panama route, with the encouragement of President Theodore Roosevelt.

In his 1904 annual message to Congress, President Roosevelt stated:

“Chronic wrongdoing . . . may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States . . . to the exercise of an international police power.”

This interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine became known as the Roosevelt Corollary. It also increased American interest in those nations near the Panama Canal because the canal put them “in the front yard of the United States” according to Secretary of War Elihu Root.

When Nicaraguan President José Santos Zelaya solicited funds to build a second interoceanic canal, especially from Germany (whose capital investments stood three times greater in Nicaragua than that of the U.S.), Washington turned against a leader that some Nicaraguans compared to Roosevelt himself. When Zelaya’s government executed two American mercenaries for aiding anti-government rebels, Washington broke diplomatic relations, threatened naval intervention, and forced Zelaya into exile. The U.S. then negotiated a treaty with the new conservative government of Adolfo Díaz.

---

*Continued on next page*

---

**Dollar  
Diplomacy**

Another American policy that affected Nicaragua was the principle of “dollar diplomacy.” Its supporters believed that American businesses should invest in the Latin American republics in order to head off European financiers. If mismanagement or political disturbances endangered American investments, then the United States would intervene.

In 1912, the new Nicaraguan government faced financial disorder and revolution. In September 1912, the U.S. ordered 354 marines into battle on behalf of the Díaz regime and to protect American lives and property. After tipping the scales against rebel forces, the marines returned home, leaving a force of 100 to guard the American legation. (When rebellions ensued in 1925, the marines returned to quell the disturbances.) Nicaraguan finances were placed under American control. One U.S. envoy reported, however, that “the natural sentiment of the overwhelming majority of Nicaraguans is antagonistic to the United States.”

In 1916, the U.S. and Nicaragua agreed to the Bryan-Chamorro Treaty. In exchange for \$3 million, the U.S. acquired the right to build a canal across Nicaraguan territory, lease the Great and Little Corn Islands, and establish a naval base in the Gulf of Fonseca. It also excluded European Powers from the Gulf of Fonseca. During the 1916 Nicaraguan presidential election, American President Woodrow Wilson ordered U.S. warships to cruise offshore to demonstrate this point.

---

**Augusto César  
Sandino**

Nicaragua was subjected to direct foreign military intervention from U.S. troops from 1912 to 1925 and again from 1926 to 1933. When President Coolidge ordered the marines to return the second time, he stated that “We are not making war on Nicaragua any more than a policeman is on the street is making war on passersby.” Nicaraguans saw it differently. “The Machos are coming,” they said of the marines. “They will burn our houses.”

During the first occupation, from 1912 to 1925, the United States ran Nicaraguan affairs through a series of Conservative presidents. During the second occupation Washington arranged a truce (the “Peace of Tipitapa”) between the Liberals and the Conservatives that, among other things, provided for a free U.S.-supervised election in 1928. Although Jose Maria Moncada, the Liberal Party candidate, won the election, the United States still remained essentially in control of Nicaraguan affairs.

---

*Continued on next page*



**Augusto César Sandino**

One revolutionary leader refused to surrender the struggle against the puppet governments created by the United States. Calling Moncada a traitor and denouncing United States intervention, rebel leader Augusto César Sandino reorganized his forces as the Army for the Defense of Nicaraguan Sovereignty (Ejército Defensor de la Soberanía de Nicaragua-EDSN). From 1927 to 1933, he led a tenacious guerrilla war against government forces and the American forces of occupation, which numbered 50,000 by 1929. Sandino protested the “corrupting vice of the dollar in Nicaragua” and blasted the Monroe Doctrine as meaning “America for the Yankees.” His struggle took on the character of a war of national liberation.

The upshot of Sandino's activities was that the marines and government troops eventually found themselves bogged down in a costly Vietnam-type war that they simply could not win militarily. Practices such as the aerial bombardment of "hostile" towns and hamlets and the forced resettlement of peasant populations only intensified popular identification with the guerrilla cause. After debating whether to continue direct fighting against Sandino's forces, the United States opted to develop and train the nonpartisan Nicaraguan National Guard to contain internal violence. As the marines were withdrawn in 1933, command of this new "national" army passed from the Americans to an ambitious Nicaraguan politician, Anastasio Somoza Garcia.

Because his major condition for peace had been the departure of the marines, Sandino signed a preliminary peace agreement, in February 1933, with the Sacasa government. Calling for a cessation of hostilities and a partial disarmament of the guerrillas, the document also guaranteed amnesty for Sandino's men and a degree of autonomy for those Sandinists who wished to settle in the territory along the Rio Coco. In 1934 there were further peace negotiations. In the long run, however, Sandino was deceived, captured, and executed under the orders of Anastasio Somoza Garcia. But his daring stand against the foreign occupier had made him into Nicaragua's national hero.

---

#### **Sources**

*Enciclopedia de Nicaragua*. Editorial Oceano. Barcelona, Spain. 2002

Walker, Thomas W. *Nicaragua: The Land of Sandino*. Westview Press. Boulder, Colorado. 1981

Paterson, Thomas G., et al, *American Foreign Relations: A History Since 1895*. Houghton Mifflin Company. Boston. 2000

---

# The Somoza Era

---

## Objectives

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:

- analyze the political, economic and social characteristics of Nicaragua in the Somoza era.
  - describe the policies developed by the Somoza family and evaluate their impact on the Nicaraguan people.
  - compare the principles of democratic government to the policies developed by the Somoza dynasty.
- 

## Materials

- Student Handout: **The Somoza Dynasty**
  - Student Handout: **Somocismo and Democracy: A Comparison**
- 

## Activities

1. Distribute the student handouts entitled **Somocismo and Democracy: A Comparison**.
    - a. Begin the exercise by asking students to answer the first question for the government of the United States.
    - b. Place the dates January 1, 1937 and July 19, 1979 on the chalkboard.
    - c. Ask students if they know how many presidents the United States had in that time period. (Eight: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard M. Nixon, Gerald R. Ford, and Jimmy Carter.)
    - d. Ask students to answer the second question for the government of the United States. (All were all either elected to the office or assumed the office upon the death or resignation of the previous president.)
    - e. Ask students to answer the third question for the government of the United States and explain the concept of checks and balances contained within the U.S. Constitution.
    - f. Place the following statement on the chalkboard or display it on an overhead transparency: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed”
    - g. Ask students to answer the fourth and fifth questions for the government of the United States based on the principles stated in the above excerpt from the Declaration of Independence.
- 

*Continued on next page*

---

## Activities

- **Key concept:** Government exists to protect the natural rights of the citizen and should, therefore, make decisions in the public interest.
  - **Key concept:** All legitimate power derives from the will of the people (popular sovereignty).
2. Direct the attention of the students to the two dates listed on the chalkboard.
    - a. Explain that the first date (January 1, 1937) represents the date Anastasio Somoza García officially gained control of the Nicaraguan government.
    - b. Explain that the second date (July 19, 1979) represents the date when his son, Anastasio Somoza Debayle, was removed from power by a popular revolution.
    - c. Explain that during this forty-two and a half year period Nicaragua was governed by three men from the same family. They established a system of government known as *Somocismo*.
  3. Distribute the student handout entitled **The Somoza Dynasty**.
    - a. Divide the class into work groups.
    - b. Direct each group to read through the handout and to use the information it contains to answer the questions about *Somocismo* on the comparison chart.
    - c. When students have completed their research and answered the questions, ask spokespersons from each group to share their findings with the class.
  4. Concluding Activity

Direct students to write a brief essay in which they answer the following question: “In your opinion, what are the most important differences between *Somocismo* and democratic government.”
-

## Somocismo and Democracy: A Comparison

	<b>Somocismo</b>	<b>Democratic Government</b>
Who are the leaders? (i.e. President, Prime Minister, Dictator, etc.)		
How are the chosen?		
Who makes the decisions?		
In whose interests are the decisions made?		
What is the role of the individual citizen within the state?		

# The Somoza Dynasty

---

## **The Rise of Anastasio Somoza García**



Anastasio Somoza García was just short of thirty-five years old when the departing U.S. marines turned over to him the command of the National Guard. In the years immediately following the departure of the marines, Somoza worked efficiently to consolidate his control over the guard, purging officers who might have stood in his way. Also, on February 21, 1934, he gave his subordinates permission to capture and murder Augusto César Sandino. Sandino's execution was followed by the persecution and execution of hundreds of men, women, and children living in the semiautonomous region previously set aside for the former guerrillas.

By 1936, Somoza was sufficiently sure of his control of the National Guard and Nicaraguan politics to overthrow the elected president, Juan B. Sacasa and stage an "election" in which he was the inevitable winner. He was inaugurated on January 1, 1937, beginning the forty-two-and-a-half year reign of the Somoza family.

---

## **The Rule of Anastasio Somoza García (1937 – 1956)**

"Tacho" Somoza was the dictator of Nicaragua for nineteen years. In these years he developed an effective style of rule that was to characterize the Somoza dynasty until the late 1960s. He ruled Nicaragua with a strong arm, deriving his power from three main sources: the ownership or control of large portions of the Nicaraguan economy, the military support of the National Guard, and his acceptance of support from the United States. Family members and close associates were given key positions within the government and the military. The Somoza family also controlled the Liberal Party (PLN), which in turn controlled the legislature and judicial system, thus giving Somoza García absolute power over every sphere of Nicaraguan politics.

The guard's loyalty was assured by keeping direct command in the family and by continuing the practice of psychologically isolating the guardsmen from the people by encouraging them to be corrupt and exploitative. Accordingly, gambling, prostitution, smuggling, and other forms of vice were run directly by guardsmen. In addition, it was necessary to pay bribes or kickbacks to guard officers or soldiers if a person wanted to engage in any type of business activity. In effect, the guard was a sort of Mafia in uniform, which served simultaneously as the personal bodyguard of the Somoza family. The institutional power of the National Guard grew in most government-owned enterprises, until eventually it controlled the national radio and telegraph networks, the postal and immigration services, health services, the internal revenue service, and the national railroads.

---

*Continued on next page*

---

Somoza García built an immense fortune for himself and his family during the 1940s. Among his many industrial enterprises, Somoza García owned textile companies, sugar mills, rum distilleries, the merchant marine lines, the national Nicaraguan Airlines, and La Salud dairy—the country's only pasteurized milk facility. Somoza García also gained large profits from economic concessions to national and foreign companies, bribes, and illegal exports. By the end of World War II, Somoza García had amassed one of the largest fortunes in the region—an estimated US\$60 million.

Somoza García had many political enemies, and coups against him were attempted periodically, even within the National Guard. For protection, he constructed a secure compound within his residence and kept personal bodyguards, independent of the National Guard, with him wherever he went. Nevertheless, on September 21, 1956, while attending a PLN party in León to celebrate his nomination for the presidency, Somoza García was fatally wounded by Rigoberto López Pérez, a twenty-seven-year-old Nicaraguan poet, who had managed to pass through Somoza García's security. The dictator was flown to the Panama Canal Zone, where he died eight days later.

---

**Luis Somoza**  
(1957 – 1967)

Luis Somoza Debayle assumed the position of interim president after his father's death. His brother Anastasio "Tachito" Somoza Debayle took over leadership of the National Guard. A major political repression campaign followed the assassination: many political opponents were tortured and imprisoned by the National Guard and the government imposed press censorship and suspended many civil liberties. In 1957, Luis Somoza Debayle was formally "elected" to a term that would expire in 1963.

In 1960 Nicaragua joined El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras in the establishment of the Central American Common Market. The main objective of the regional economic group was to promote trade among member countries. Under this partnership, trade and manufacturing increased, greatly stimulating economic growth.

In the international political sphere, Luis Somoza Debayle's anticommunist stance won government favor and support from the United States. In 1959 Nicaragua was among the first nations to condemn the Cuban Revolution, and the Nicaraguan government played a leading role in the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961, allowing the Cuban exile brigade to use military bases on the Caribbean coast to launch the failed maneuver.

All was not well, however, during Luis Somoza's reign. A new opposition group, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) had begun guerrilla operations in 1962. In response to these "subversive" activities, the United States helped increase the National Guard's anti-guerrilla capabilities.

---

*Continued on next page*

---

**Anastasio  
Somoza  
Debayle  
(1967 – 1979)**

Anastasio Somoza Debayle gained control of Nicaragua in a blatantly rigged election in June 1967. As chief of the National Guard, he relied on the old tradition of encouraging corruption and protecting officers from prosecution for crimes committed against civilians. Whereas Luis had surrounded himself with a group of highly trained development technicians, Anastasio soon began replacing these skilled administrators with essentially unqualified cronies and political allies. Anastasio showed no restraint in using public office for personal enrichment. The result was that by the 1970s Somoza's legitimacy and civilian power base were evaporating rapidly and the government was becoming increasingly corrupt and inefficient.

After the 1972 earthquake leveled a 600-square block area in the heart of Managua, Somoza chose to turn the national disaster to short-term personal advantage. He allowed the National Guard to plunder and sell international relief materials and to participate in looting the devastated commercial sector. In addition, Somoza and his associates used their control of the government to channel international relief funds to their own pockets. The promised reconstruction of the heart of the city never took place. Emergency housing funds channeled to Nicaragua by the Agency for International Development went disproportionately into the construction of luxury housing for National Guard officers, while the homeless poor were asked to content themselves with hastily constructed wooden shacks.

It was at this point that open expression of popular discontent began to surface. A series of strikes and demonstrations developed as citizens became increasingly angry and politically mobilized. In addition, many independent businessmen resented the way Somoza had muscled his way into the construction and banking sectors. They were increasingly angry at being asked to pay new emergency taxes at a time when Somoza was using his position to appropriate international relief funds. As a result, more and more young people from elite backgrounds joined the Sandinista Liberation Front (FSLN).

In December 1974, a unit of the FSLN held a group of elite Managua partygoers hostage until the government met a series of demands, including payment of a large ransom and the transportation of 14 imprisoned FSLN rebels and themselves to Cuba. After the event, Somoza imposed martial law and sent his National Guard into the countryside to root out the "terrorists." In the process, the National Guard engaged in extensive pillage, arbitrary imprisonment, torture, rape, and summary execution of hundreds of peasants. The Roman Catholic Church demanded an explanation of these atrocities from Somoza and then denounced these human rights violations before the world.

---

*Continued on next page*

---

President Jimmy Carter, advocating the promotion of human rights internationally, pressed Somoza to change his policies. In response, Somoza ordered the National Guard to stop terrorizing the peasantry, and reinstated freedom of the press. Newspapers such as Pedro Joaquín Chamorro's *La Prensa* began to cover opposition activities and discuss in detail the past and present corruption and rights violations of the Somoza regime. The newspaper ran articles on opposition meetings, successful guerrilla actions, and the fate of "missing" peasants in guerrilla areas.

A group of prominent citizens—professionals, businessmen, and clergy who became known as The Twelve—denounced the dictatorship and called for a change in government that would include the FSLN. Most Nicaraguans now felt, as did The Twelve, that

“there can be no dialogue with Somoza . . . because he is the principal obstacle to all rational understanding . . . through the long dark history of *Somocismo*, dialogues with the dictatorship have only served to strengthen it . . .”

---

**Sources**

*Enciclopedia de Nicaragua*. Editorial Oceano. Barcelona, Spain. 2002

*Nicaragua: A Country Study*, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress.

*Nicaragua: The Land of Sandino* by Thomas W. Walker. Westview Press. Boulder, Colorado. 1981

---

# The Sandinista Era

---

## Objectives

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:

- explain the hopes and expectations of the Nicaraguan people following the overthrow of the Somoza Dynasty.
  - describe the policies developed by the Sandinista government and evaluate their impact on the Nicaraguan people.
  - analyze the origins of the Contra War and evaluate its consequences.
- 

## Materials

- Student Handout: **The Sandinista Revolution**
  - Student Handout: **The Sandinista Government**
- 

## Activities

5. Explain that all revolutions have both an immediate cause (a particular incident that triggers rebellion) and a series of underlying causes that create the atmosphere in which revolution takes place.
    - a. Explain that according to historian Crane Brinton, revolutions such as the one that overthrew Somoza have four underlying causes. (List the four causes on the chalkboard.)
      - Political inefficiency
      - Economic discontent
      - Social class antagonism
      - Desertion of the intellectuals (when respected leaders in society openly speak out against the government and call for change)
    - b. Direct students to review their materials from the previous lesson (*The Somoza Era*) and ask them to identify any events or situations that indicate the presence of any of the four underlying causes.
    - c. Following their review, ask students to share their findings. List their observations on the chalkboard.
  6. Distribute the student handout entitled **The Sandinista Revolution**.
    - a. Direct students to read the first two paragraphs.
    - b. Ask them to explain why the assassination of Chamorro can be identified as the immediate cause of the revolution. What did Chamorro represent?
  7. Direct students to read the remaining paragraphs on the first page.
    - a. Ask students to hypothesize why the anti-Somoza movement had such broad support.
- 

*Continued on next page*

- 
- b. Ask students to evaluate the actions of the National Guard in Monimbo. What do their actions reveal about the nature of the Somoza regime?
    8. Direct students to read the remaining paragraphs of the handout.
      - a. Ask students to hypothesize why the anti-Somoza movement was eventually successful.
      - b. Write the phrase “Broad Opposition Front” on the chalkboard and ask students to explain the significance of the term. What does it reveal about the nature of the opposition to Somoza?
    9. Distribute the student handout entitled **The Sandinista Government**.
      - a. Direct students to read the first paragraph on the first page.
      - b. Ask students to summarize the cost to the Nicaraguan people of the overthrow of Somoza.
      - c. Ask students to place themselves in the situation of an average Nicaraguan citizen in July 1979. What are your hopes and expectations now that the Somoza regime has been overthrown? What is it that you want from this new government that is replacing Somoza?
      - d. Write student responses on the chalkboard.
    10. Direct students to read the first page in its entirety.
      - a. Ask students to review the list of hopes and expectations they had listed on the chalkboard.
      - b. Ask students to evaluate the Sandinista programs summarized on this page. Have these programs addressed any of these needs or expectations in a positive fashion? Which programs? How? (**Note:** the Minister of National Education, Carlos Tunnermann, received the UNESCO Prize in 1980 for the achievements of the National Literacy Campaign.)
      - c. Direct the attention of the class to the last sentence in the second paragraph. What does it mean to rule by “unappealable decree?” How much decision making power did the junta have? What limits were placed on its power? Is this democratic?
    11. Direct students to read the second page in its entirety.
      - a. Ask students to explain the reasons why opposition to the Sandinistas began to develop in Nicaragua. What policies were the Sandinistas following that created this opposition?
      - b. Ask students to review the list of hopes and expectations they had listed on the chalkboard. Have the Sandinistas achieved these goals? Why or why not?

---

*Continued on next page*

- 
12. Direct students to read the third page in its entirety.
    - a. Ask students to explain and evaluate U.S. policy towards Nicaragua during the Reagan administration. How did it contribute to conflict in Nicaragua?
    - b. Ask students to evaluate Sandinista policies as the Contra War intensified. Are their policies in keeping with democratic principles? Why or why not?
  13. Direct students to read the fourth page in its entirety.
    - a. Ask students to evaluate Sandinista policies following the election of 1984. Are their policies in keeping with democratic principles? Why or why not?
    - b. Ask students to review the Esquipulas II proposed by Oscar Arias Sánchez as described in the last paragraph.
      - If you were in the Sandinista government would you agree to this plan? Why or why not?
      - If you were a Contra would agree to this plan? Why or why not?
  14. Direct students to read the text on the fifth page of the handout.
    - a. Ask students to hypothesize why Daniel Ortega agreed to negotiate with the Contras. What would be his motivation? How would it benefit the people of Nicaragua?
    - b. Ask students to evaluate the election of 1990 and to hypothesize why the Nicaraguan people chose to elect a new government.
  15. Direct students to examine the costs of the Contra War as indicated in the table at the bottom of the fifth page.
    - a. Ask students to evaluate the impact of the Contra War on the Nicaraguan people.
    - b. Direct students to re-read the first paragraph in the handout and ask them to evaluate the combined impact of the Sandinista Revolution and the Contra War on the Nicaraguan people.
    - c. Ask students to place themselves in the situation of an average Nicaraguan citizen in July 1979.
      - What are your hopes and expectations now that the Somoza regime has been overthrown?
      - What is it that you want from this new government that is replacing Somoza?
      - How hopeful would you be that your hopes and expectations would be fulfilled? Why?

---

*Continued on next page*

---

## 16. Concluding Activity

Direct students to write a critique of the following position taken by Sergio Ramierz in his book *Adios Muchachos*: "Although in its decline the Sandinista movement ended up burying the dreams of thousands of young people who took up arms, its main legacy was the establishment of democracy in Nicaragua."

---

## The Sandinista Revolution

---

The immediate cause of the revolution that removed Anastasio Somoza Debayle from power was the assassination of newspaper editor Pedro Joaquin Chamorro on January 10, 1978, as he was driving to work. This dramatic assassination was the final catalyst for a war that culminated in the complete overthrow of the Somoza system eighteen months later. The revolution was the result of a concerted effort by virtually all major groups and classes in the country.

The assassination of Chamorro enraged the Nicaraguan people. Immediately after the assassination, angry crowds surged through the streets of Managua burning Somoza-owned buildings and shouting anti-Somoza slogans. Later, when it became apparent that the official murder investigation was to be a cover-up, the chambers of commerce and industry led the country in an unprecedented general strike that lasted for more than two weeks, with 80 to 90 percent effectiveness. When it became clear that it was hurting the Nicaraguan people more than Somoza, however, the strike was called off.

The fact that the strike was over, however, did not mean that Somoza's troubles had ended. To the contrary, Nicaraguans of all classes had experienced the thrill and surge of pride that came with defying the dictator and were, therefore, in no mood to let things slip back to normal. For the next several months, acts against the regime came in various forms. There were daring and quite successful attacks by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) on National Guard headquarters in several cities, mass demonstrations, labor and student strikes and civil uprisings in urban areas.

The events of February in Monimbo—an Indian neighborhood in Masaya—were a preview of what was to happen in most Nicaraguan cities that September, when poorly armed civilians rose up against the dictatorship only to be brutally pounded into submission. Fighting in Monimbo broke out between the local inhabitants and the guard on February 10, the one-month anniversary of the Chamorro assassination, and again on February 21, the forty-fourth anniversary of Sandino's assassination. On the second occasion, the inhabitants set up barricades, hoisted banners declaring Monimbo to be a free territory, and held the guard back for almost a week with a pathetic assortment of weapons consisting of homemade bombs, 22-caliber rifles, pistols, machetes, axes, rocks, and clubs. Before it could declare Monimbo "secure" on February 28, the regime had to use a force of 600 heavily armed men backed by two tanks, three armored cars, five 50-caliber machine guns, two helicopter gunships, and two light planes. In the process, the neighborhood was devastated and many dozens, perhaps hundreds, of civilians were either killed outright or arrested and never seen again.

---

*Continued on next page*



**El Combatiente  
Desconocido  
(León)**

On August 25, the Broad Opposition Front (composed of most of Nicaragua's political parties and organizations) demanded Somoza's resignation and declared another nationwide strike, which paralyzed the country for almost a month. Simultaneously, Monimbo-style civil uprisings occurred in cities throughout the country, including Masaya, Matagalpa, Managua, Chinandega, Leon, Jinotepe, Diriamba, and Esteli. Once again, young people armed only with an assortment of pistols, hunting rifles, shotguns, and homemade bombs erected paving block barricades and fought the National Guard. Several towns, including Leon, held out for a week or more against terrible odds. The outcome, however, was inevitable. The National Guard fought with unusual ferocity and vengeance, leveling large sections of several cities and taking the lives of between 3,000 and 5,000 people.

It was now clear to the Nicaraguan people that neither general strikes nor poorly armed mass uprisings would drive Somoza from office. The dictator and his guard had demonstrated their willingness to slaughter and destroy in order to preserve their position. The next uprising would have to be led by a larger, well-trained, well-armed guerrilla force.



**Sandinista  
Guerrillas**

In the first half of 1979 recruitment and training of young men and women—primarily students from urban areas—increased dramatically as the regular FSLN army expanded from several hundred to several thousand. Members of the opposition traveled throughout the world explaining the Sandinist cause and soliciting donations that were used to purchase modern light, Western-made weapons on the international arms market.

The final offensive was declared early in June 1979. Paving-block barricades were erected in poor neighborhoods throughout the country, and National Guard outposts were overcome one by one as the dictator's control of the country shrank. In mid-June a broad-based government-in-exile was announced by the FSLN. The government of the United States arranged for the departure of Somoza to Miami on July 17. A day later, the provisional government took the oath of office in a ceremony held in Leon and, on July 19, the FSLN entered Managua and accepted the surrender of most of what was left of the National Guard. Ecstatic crowds tore the statues of Anastasio Senior and Luis Somoza from their pedestals and dragged the broken pieces triumphantly through the streets. On July 20, the provisional government entered the capital and appeared in the main plaza to receive the acclaim of a jubilant and grateful people.

---

**Source**

Adapted from *Nicaragua: The Land of Sandino* by Thomas W. Walker. Westview Press. Boulder, Colorado. 1981

---

## The Sandinista Government (1979 – 1990)

---

The new government inherited a country in ruins, with a stagnant economy and a debt of about \$1.6 billion. An estimated 50,000 Nicaraguans were dead, 120,000 were exiles in neighboring countries, and 600,000 were homeless. Food and fuel supplies were exhausted, and international relief organizations were trying to deal with disease caused by lack of health supplies. Yet the attitude of the vast majority of Nicaraguans toward the revolution was decidedly hopeful. Most Nicaraguans saw the Sandinista victory as an opportunity to create a system free of the political, social, and economic inequalities of the almost universally hated Somoza regime.

The Sandinistas saw their revolution as freeing people from social, economic, and political oppression. With their triumph in July of 1979, a Government of National Reconstruction was created, composed of a five-member junta. Its first decision was to abolish the constitution of 1974 and to decree the confiscation of the possessions of Somoza and his "close friends." It also issued a decree guaranteeing individual civil and political rights. The declared objective of the new government was to work for political pluralism, a mixed economic system, and a nonaligned foreign policy. However, the junta ruled by *unappealable* decree under emergency powers.

In his book *Adios Muchachos*, Sergio Ramirez, who served as vice-president under Daniel Ortega in the 1980s, states that the revolution was an effort to change Nicaragua's fate in every sense. One of the immediate goals of the new government was reconstruction of the national economy. Pledging food for the poor, the junta made restructuring the economy its highest priority. At first the economy experienced positive growth, largely because of renewed inflow of foreign aid and reconstruction after the war.

One of the Sandinistas' first actions was to implement a literacy campaign, teaching peasants throughout the country to read and to write and making all education free. Illiteracy fell from 50 to 13%. Medicine was also made free, polio and measles were eliminated through extensive immunization campaigns and infant mortality was reduced by a third. The rate of inflation subsequently declined from 84% to 27%.

Prior to 1979, about 4% of the landowners controlled about 52% of the arable land. The new government attempted to address this issue by enacting the Agrarian Reform Law, which confiscated all of the rural properties owned by the Somoza family or people associated with the Somozas, a total of 2,000 farms representing more than 20 percent of Nicaragua's cultivable land. These farms became state property. The landlords that had had their land expropriated were also politically and socially persecuted.

---

*Continued on next page*

---

Another goal of the Sandinistas was a change in the old government's pattern of repression and brutality toward the general populace. In their first two years in power, Amnesty International and other human rights groups found the human rights situation in Nicaragua greatly improved.

However, political difficulties were on the horizon. The fight against Somoza and the National Guard had allowed the diverse segments of Nicaraguan society to come together in a common cause. Now, this diversity of interests also made it inevitable that the alliance would eventually fall apart.

In April 1980 two of the five members of the junta resigned due to their differences with the other members of the ruling body and the political direction the country was taking under the leadership of Daniel Ortega and the Sandinistas. Although both were replaced, by May of 1981, the junta consisted of only three members, with Daniel Ortega clearly playing the lead role among the remaining three. Firmly in control of the government, the Sandinistas moved steadily to the left, eventually espousing Marxist-Leninist positions.

In addition to its increased political control of Nicaragua, the Sandinistas had the best organized and most experienced military force in the country. To replace the National Guard, the Sandinistas established a new national army, the Sandinista People's Army (Ejército Popular Sandinista—EPS), and a police force, the Sandinista Police (Policía Sandinista—PS). These two groups were trained by personnel from Cuba, Eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union. The EPS developed into the largest and best equipped military force in Central America. Compulsory military service, introduced during 1983, brought the EPS forces to about 80,000 by the mid-1980s.

An armed opposition movement began to develop in Nicaragua. These groups became known as the Contras (short for *contrarevolucionarios*). According to Contra leader Oscar Manuel Sobalvarro “It was the repression carried out by the Sandinistas which forced me to take the decision to fight, in particular because we saw that Nicaragua's democracy was under threat. The Sandinistas promised democracy, but what we began to see a few months after their triumph was very different.” By 1984, the resistance controlled the northeastern zone of the country and was receiving increased support from the United States.

---

*Continued on next page*

---

From late 1979 through 1980, the Carter administration had made efforts to work with FSLN policies. However, when President Ronald Reagan took office in January 1981, the United States government launched a campaign to isolate the Sandinista government. Claiming that Nicaragua, with assistance from Cuba and the Soviet Union, was supplying arms to the guerrillas in El Salvador, the Reagan administration suspended all United States aid to Nicaragua on January 23, 1981. Later that year, the Reagan administration authorized support for groups trying to overthrow the Sandinistas.

As the Contra war intensified, the Sandinistas' tolerance of political pluralism waned. The Sandinistas imposed emergency laws to ban criticism and organization of political opposition. Most social programs suffered as a result of the war because the Sandinista regime was forced to increase military spending until half of its budget went for defense. Agricultural production also declined sharply as refugees fled areas of conflict.

The bishops of the Roman Catholic Church, although supportive of the anti-Somoza movement during the late 1970s, later opposed the Sandinista regime in the 1980s. The church in Nicaragua became split. The radical branch included priests who joined the Sandinista government. Ernesto Cardenal Martínez, a Jesuit priest who had joined the Sandinista Revolution, became the Minister of Culture for the FSLN government. Father Miguel D'Escoto Brockman (also known as Jerónimo) was appointed Minister of Foreign Relations, and Father Edgardo Parrales Castillo was named Minister of Social Welfare. However, Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo (the former archbishop of Managua) soon became as critical of the FSLN as he had been of the Somoza dictatorship. The cardinal's opposition brought internal divisions within the Roman Catholic Church, with one side, the hierarchy, rejecting the Marxist philosophy of the Sandinista leadership, and the other, the Popular Church, participating in the civic struggle of the people.

By 1981 the country's most influential papers, *La Prensa*, joined the growing chorus of dissent against the Sandinista government. Under the state of emergency declared in 1982, the paper was subject to prior censorship. Despite several instances of suspended publication, some mandated by the Ministry of Interior, and some in protest by the paper's editor over cut copy, the paper continued to operate. In anticipation of upcoming elections, the government eased censorship. Increased latitude in what it could publish only increased *La Prensa's* bitter criticism of the government.

---

*Continued on next page*

---

On November 4 1984, about 75 percent of the registered voters went to the polls. The FSLN won 67 percent of the votes, the presidency, and sixty-one of the ninety-six seats in the new National Assembly. The three conservative parties that remained in the election garnered twenty-nine seats in the National Assembly; the three parties on the left won a total of six seats. Foreign observers generally reported that the election was fair. Opposition groups, however, said that the FSLN domination of government organs, mass organizations groups, and much of the media created a climate of intimidation that precluded a truly open election. Inauguration came on January 10, 1985; the date was selected because it was the seventh anniversary of the assassination of newspaper editor Chamorro. Attending Ortega's swearing in as president were the presidents of Yugoslavia and Cuba, the vice presidents of Argentina and the Soviet Union, and four foreign ministers from Latin America.

Although the electoral process was recognized internationally as legitimate, the war intensified. The Sandinista government was forced to divert more and more of its economic resources from economic development to defense against the Contras. The FSLN government also suspended civil liberties. Both the media and the Roman Catholic bishops were accused of destabilizing the political system. The church's press, as well as the conservative newspaper *La Prensa*, were censored or closed at various periods because of their critical views on the military draft and the government's handling of the civil war.

In November 1986 the policy of the Reagan administration toward Nicaragua was shaken by the discovery of an illegal operation in which funds from weapons sold to Iran during 1985 were diverted to the Contras. In the aftermath of the Iran-Contra affair, the United States Congress stopped all military support to the Contras in 1987 except for what was called "non-lethal" aid. The result of the cutoff was a military stalemate; the Contras were unable or unwilling to keep on fighting without full United States support, and the Sandinista government could not afford to continue waging an unpopular war that had already devastated the economy.

After Oscar Arias Sánchez was elected to the presidency of Costa Rica in 1986, he designed a regional plan to bring peace to Central America. Known as Esquipulas II, this plan called for amnesty for persons charged with political crimes, a negotiated cease-fire, national reconciliation, an end to all external aid to insurgencies, and democratic reforms leading to free elections in Nicaragua.

---

*Continued on next page*

---

The dramatic internal situation facing the country, combined with diplomatic pressures, forced to the Sandinista government to negotiate with the resistance and to initiate a peace process. At a summit of Central American presidents held on January 15, 1988, when President Daniel Ortega agreed to hold direct talks with the Contras, to lift the state of emergency, and to call for national elections. In March the FSLN government met with representatives of the Contras and signed a cease-fire agreement. The Sandinistas granted a general amnesty to all Contra members and freed former members of the National Guard who were still imprisoned.

In February 1989, the five Central American presidents met once again in Costa del Sol, El Salvador, and agreed on a plan to support the disarming and dissolving of Contra forces in Honduras, as well as their voluntary repatriation into Nicaragua. President Ortega also agreed to move the next national elections, scheduled for the fall of 1990, up to February 1990; to guarantee fair participation for opposition parties; and to allow international observers to monitor the entire electoral process.

On June 6, 1989, fourteen parties, united only in their opposition to the Sandinistas, formed a coalition called the National Opposition Union (Unión Nacional Opositora--UNO), whose support was drawn from a broad base, including conservative and liberal parties. The anti-Sandinista coalition nominated Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, publisher of *La Prensa* and former member of the junta, as their candidate for president. The FSLN nominated Daniel Ortega for the presidency and Sergio Ramírez Mercado as his running mate. In the February 25, 1990, elections, Violeta Barrios de Chamorro carried 55 percent of the popular vote against Daniel Ortega's 41 percent. Exhausted by war and poverty, the Nicaraguan people had opted for change.

---

### The Cost of The Contra War

Victims	1980-1982	1983-1995	1986-1989	Total
EPS/Civilians	606	11,699	20,004	32,309
Contras	397	12,280	16,840	29,517
Total	1,003	23,979	36,844	61,826

---

### Sources

Karlos Navarro. *Historia de Nicaragua Para Niños y Niñas*. Programa Textos Escolares Nacionales. Managua, 2001.

*Enciclopedia de Nicaragua*. Editorial Oceano. Barcelona, Spain. 2002

*Nicaragua: A Country Study*, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress.

---

# Who's Who in Nicaragua: An Historical and Cultural Perspective

---

## Objectives

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:

- identify the contributions of key individuals to Nicaraguan history and culture.
  - examine the roles of said individuals from an historical and cultural perspective.
- 

## Materials

- Available Internet and/or library materials
  - Student Handout: **Biography Sign-up Sheet**
  - Student Handout: **Biography Data Sheet**
  - Teacher Handout: **Teacher Information Sheet**
- 

## Note to the Teacher

The following Internet sites can be useful for students in conducting their research. Data collected from these sites was used in creating the information included in the **Teacher Information Sheet**.

- [www.nmu.edu/www-edgar/language/Martin/dariobio.htm](http://www.nmu.edu/www-edgar/language/Martin/dariobio.htm)
  - [www.infoplease.com/ce6/people/A0853338.html](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/people/A0853338.html)
  - <http://www.sandino.org/sandino.htm>
  - [library.thinkquest.org/17749/laleman.html](http://library.thinkquest.org/17749/laleman.html)
  - <http://www.hickoksports.com>
  - <http://www.trocaire.org/overseas/cenamerica/nicaragua.htm>
  - [www.uhmc.sunysb.edu/surgery/cardenal3.html](http://www.uhmc.sunysb.edu/surgery/cardenal3.html)
  - [www.cnn.com/resources/newsmakers/world/namerica/chamorro.html](http://www.cnn.com/resources/newsmakers/world/namerica/chamorro.html)
  - [library.thinkquest.org/17749/ortega.html](http://library.thinkquest.org/17749/ortega.html)
  - <http://www.lasmujeres.com/giocondabelli/bio.shtml>
  - [www.dennismartinezfoundation.org/](http://www.dennismartinezfoundation.org/)
  - [www.geocities.com/dreampitchers/id75.htm](http://www.geocities.com/dreampitchers/id75.htm)
  - [www.rose-hulman.edu/~delacova/nicaragua/pastora.htm](http://www.rose-hulman.edu/~delacova/nicaragua/pastora.htm)
  - [members.tripod.com/luisemejiagodoy/](http://members.tripod.com/luisemejiagodoy/)
  - [http://www.calnative.com/n\\_walk.htm](http://www.calnative.com/n_walk.htm)
  - <http://www.angel.org.ni/2000-36/invitado-i.html>
- 

*Continued on next page*

---

**Activities**

1. Create an instruction sheet for the project that includes directions, expectations, due dates and a copy of the scoring rubric or other method of evaluation.
2. Distribute the student handout entitled **Biography Sign-up Sheet** and a copy of the instructions to each student.
  - a. Explain that the **Biography Sign-up Sheet** contains a list of key individuals in Nicaraguan history and that each student is to choose one person to research.
  - b. Instruct students to write a one to two page biography, in English, of the person they chose, highlighting that person's contributions to Nicaraguan history and/or culture.
  - c. For Spanish language classes, instruct students to also write a summary of their biography (approximately 100 words, depending on the level of the class) in Spanish.
3. Once research has been completed, instruct students to prepare a short presentation for the class in which they play the part of the person they researched, presenting the information they found in the 1<sup>st</sup> person.
  - a. While each student presents, the other students should complete the data sheet with the information required.
  - b. Review the data sheets with the class at the end of the presentations to ensure the accuracy of the information given.

---

**Extension Activities**

1. Create a jeopardy-type game to review the data with the class.
  2. Give a quiz on the information learned from the biographies.
  3. For Spanish language classes, instruct students to write a journal page in Spanish for the person they researched, as if it were written by that person. They shouldn't include the person's name in the journal entry.
    - a. Collect the journal entries and redistribute them to the class.
    - b. Ask students to try to determine the author of each entry.
-

# Biography Sign-up Sheet

Ruben Dario	_____
Jose Santos Zelaya	_____
Augusto Sandino	_____
Arnoldo Aleman	_____
Alexis Argüello	_____
Anastasio Samoza Garcia	_____
Ernesto Cardenal	_____
Violeta Barrios de Chamorro	_____
Daniel Ortega	_____
Gionconda Belli	_____
Dennis Martinez	_____
Eden Pastora	_____
Luis Enrique Mejía Godoy	_____
Hernando Zuniga	_____
Alfonso Cortes	_____
Humberto Ortega	_____
Maximo Jerez	_____
William Walker	_____
Camilo Zapata	_____
Antonio Machado	_____

# Biography Data Sheet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Name	Profession	Significant Contributions or Important Facts

---

*Continued on next page*



## Teacher Information Sheet

---

**Arnoldo Aleman** *President of Nicaragua from 1997 to 2002. Accused of stealing more than \$100 million from the Nicaraguan government during his presidency.*

---

**Alexis Argüello** *Three-time world boxing champion. Began fighting at age 16; achieved great success despite humble beginnings.*

---

**Giaconda Belli** *Award winning writer/poet best know for her novel “La Mujer Habitada”*

---

**Ernesto Cardenal** *Writer, poet and ordained Catholic priest. Pro-Sandinista revolutionary and former minister of culture for Nicaragua during the Sandinista regime.*

---

**Violeta Barrios de Chamorro** *Defeated Sandinista Daniel Ortega in 1990 to become president; served one term. Widow of Pedro Chamorro, publisher of Nicaragua’s major Newspaper, La Prensa*

---

**Ruben Darío** *Writer, poet and diplomat. Founder of the Modernist movement in poetry; world traveler*

---

**Luis Enrique Mejía Godoy** *Singer/songwriter. Founder of the Mejía Godoy Foundation. Composed more than 200 songs*

---

**Dennis Martinez** *First Nicaraguan baseball player to play in the major leagues. Battled alcoholism. Started the Dennis Martinez foundation in 1997 to benefit underprivileged children.*

---

**Daniel Ortega** *Leader of the Sandinista forces that ousted Somoza in July 1977. President from 1984 to 1990. His election prompted civil war and intensified U.S. support for “contra” rebels.*

---

**Humberto Ortega** *Brother of Daniel Ortega. Former defense minister and head of the Sandinista army. Thought to be one of the richest men in Nicaragua*

---

*Continued on next page*

---

**Eden Pastora** *Sandinista guerrilla who captured Nicaragua's national palace in 1978. Named to the Sandinista regime but later defected to lead a rebel group.*

---

**Anastasio Samoza Garcia** *Dictator for two decades. Came into power in the 1930's with the support of the United States. Assassinated in 1956. Succeeded by his two sons. His family dynasty's repression was allegedly responsible for approximately 50,000 deaths. Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) was formed in the 1960's to overthrow the family regime.*

---

**Augusto Sandino** *Supporter of nationalism and anti-imperialism. Resisted U.S. occupation in Nicaragua and helped end it in 1933. Assassinated by Samoza in 1934; FSLN named after him*

---

**William Walker** *American adventurer and self-proclaimed president of Nicaragua. Planned to unite all of Central America into one country under his rule. Overthrown in 1857 and executed in Honduras in 1960.*

---

**Jose Santos Zelaya** *President from 1894 to 1909. Leader of the Liberal party. U.S. helped to overthrow him and send him into exile.*

---

**Camilo Zapata** *Folk singer and composer of "La Mora Limpia", sometimes known as "Nicaragua's second national anthem." Creator of rhythm known as Nicaraguan "Son."*