



# Las Noticias

A NEWSLETTER FOR K-12 SPANISH LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATORS  
CENTER FOR LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES,  
UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

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## NICARAGUA: PEOPLE, CULTURE, AND HISTORY

by Rosalind Eannarino

For four weeks this summer, I traveled to Nicaragua with twelve Spanish-language and social studies teachers whose field research would enable them to design curriculum for inclusion in classes at their secondary schools. Funded by a \$60,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad program, the trip represented one phase of the Center for Latin American Studies' (CLAS) outreach project, **Nicaragua: People, Culture and History**. The project served as the major component of CLAS' outreach program for the year and was implemented primarily by me and by CLAS graduate student **Manuel Román-Lacayo**. In addition to

the trip itself, the project included an eight-week pre-trip seminar, a post-trip curriculum development segment, and curriculum sharing and dissemination. The overall goal was to develop new curriculum that would present lessons from a bilateral perspective, taking into account both U.S. and Nicaraguan points of views.

On July 8, 2002, the teachers, trip coordinator **Manuel Román-Lacayo**, and I boarded the plane for a four-week exploration of Nicaragua. We utilized the cities of Managua,



Sra. Manuela Pérez Gonzales y los niños

León, and Granada as our base camps for traveling extensively throughout the country. In order to accomplish their research goals, the teachers interacted with professionals in public and private schools, museums and cultural groups, and government, educational, and social service organizations.

During the trip, we were often surprised by responses

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### Participants in Nicaragua: People, Culture, and History

- Sheila Applegate, Social Studies, Avonworth Middle School
- Margaret Carlson, Spanish, Deer Lakes High School
- Valerie Couch, Spanish, Sacred Heart School
- Len Donaldson, Curriculum Design Consultant
- Gail Edmonds, Spanish, Independence Middle School
- Kathleen Francis, Spanish, Frick International Studies Academy
- Rose Horwath, Social Studies, Chartiers Valley Middle School
- Pamela Miller, Spanish, Fox Chapel High School
- Jeff Poole, Spanish, Franklin Regional High School
- Susan Smith, Spanish, Phillips International Studies Academy
- Bridgett Tarpley, Spanish, Pittsburgh Public Schools
- Loraine Taylor, Spanish, Frick International Studies Academy



Group of Teachers in Nicaragua

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to our questions and even more so by the generosity of the Nicaraguan people. We were welcomed into villages, homes, offices, churches, and invited to join in social gatherings. We were treated as welcomed guests and, at times, as friends. When delving into political topics, we were amazed by the sentiments of some Nicaraguans toward the Sandinista administration that governed the country during the 1980s. We assumed a certain segment of the population would be avid supporters of the Sandinista movement. However, we often found people were disappointed in the lack of positive change accomplished by that administration. "There was a time for change in my country," one Nicaraguan woman confided to us, "but I'm afraid it has passed." Others



Rose Horwath and students

strongly expressed their support of the Sandinista administration because of improved educational opportunities that were available at that time. "I learned to read and write and can now own property because I can sign my name at the bank," another woman told us. In regard to the current administration, there seems to be a cautious optimism and an explicit hope that it will function effectively.

Our travels in the country brought to light for us the many similarities we share as humans; common values that far outweigh any cultural differences. While visiting the



Luvy Picardo and Manuel Román-lacayo

indigenous neighborhood of Subtiaba in León, we witnessed mothers and fathers working hard to ensure that their children received a decent education. The schools need so much, and the people are trying to provide material and moral support so that their children can have better opportunities. Sra. Manuela Perez Gonzales, community activist, took us through their computer room and emphasized their particular interest in

computer technology. She was eager to suggest ways we might be able to help by organizing an exchange of services—Spanish-language lessons for computer technology lessons. Several of the Western Pennsylvania teachers are already working on the possibility of exchanging services with this community.

We had several other remarkable experiences during a visit with educators in public schools in Managua.

We were welcomed into classrooms and enjoyed the opportunity to work alongside the teachers and students. We marveled at the educators' ability to teach in overcrowded classrooms, above the noise of the traffic and street vendors,



Ernesto Cardenal



Rosalind Eannarino in Nicaragua

and with limited materials and supplies. Their dedication to their profession was obvious.

Of the many successful educational and cultural programs we visited during our stay in Nicaragua, one of particular interest

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Plaza in Nicaragua

was Casa Esperanza, operated by former Pittsburgh resident Donna Tabor. The goal of Casa Esperanza is to provide training to children recovering from drug addiction so that they can rejoin their peers in the appropriate grade level at school. The hope is that these children may continue to succeed without drug dependency. We spent many days interacting with Donna's students. The children were eager to learn and very observant.

Manuel Román-Lacayo took the group to an archaeology dig where he conducts research. Many of the beautiful artifacts that came from this site, as well as others from around Nicaragua, are now housed in the San Francisco Museum in Granada. The museum also features paintings by Nicaraguan artists. Some of these artists are supported by the organization Casa



*Archeological Artifacts*

forest canopy that carried us high above the ground where we could view a strata of flora and fauna otherwise invisible from the ground. Later, we traveled further up to the cloud forest and were rewarded for our efforts by the sight of over 30 species of orchids. We also took time to travel by boat in Lake Nicaragua. The lake is sprinkled with isletas (little islands), occupied by fresh water sharks, and surrounded by volcanoes. Nicaragua retains its natural, pristine beauty—and this beauty is reflected in the hearts and souls of the people.

In order to achieve an understanding of the Nicaraguan point of view that would enable us to write bilateral curriculum, we had to become the students. During our stay in Nicaragua and working with Nicaraguans, we learned about their perseverance and resourcefulness. We observed a great spirit that is not easily broken by natural or political disaster. We were glad to have had the opportunity to learn so much. As Kathleen Francis, one of the Spanish teachers said, "I'm leaving a part of my heart and soul here and I want to return—perhaps next year with my teenage son."

There is much more that could be said about this project and the visit to Nicaragua. For those wanting to know more, the curriculum is complete and will be available on the Center for Latin American Studies website <http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/class> in the outreach section by the end of May 2003.



*Casa Tres Mundos Cultural Center*

Tres Mundos, a cultural center for artists and musicians. It was at Casa Tres Mundos that we had the opportunity to interview Ernesto Cardenal, a Nicaraguan poet whose work is known throughout the world and studied in Hispanic languages and literatures classes. Mr. Cardenal, now in his late seventies, has spent his entire life working for the people of Nicaragua—both as part of the Sandinista movement and as a liberation theologian. At the end of the interview, someone asked him if he still had the same feelings about the Revolution today that he had so many years ago. While he acknowledged the problems that arise when a group assumes political power, he emphasized that "the Revolution was beautiful."

No trip to Nicaragua could be complete without taking time to enjoy the natural beauty of the country. Our travels took us to the volcanoes of Mombacho and Masaya. Mombacho, inactive for hundreds of years, is now covered in tropical forest. We took part in an exhilarating tour of the

***LAS Noticias: CLAS Outreach Newsletter  
for K-12 Educators***

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## NICARAGUA

**Full country name:** Republic of Nicaragua  
**Area:** 129,494 sq km (50,180 sq mi)  
**Population:** 5.2 million (growth rate 2.6%)  
**Capital city:** Managua (pop 1 million)  
**People:** 69% mestizo, 17% European descent, 9% African descent, 5% indigenous peoples  
**Language:** Spanish, English Creole, Miskito  
**Religion:** Roman Catholic 73%, Protestant 16%  
**Government:** Republic  
**President:** Enrique Bolanos

**GDP:** US\$2.2 billion

**GDP per capita:** US\$452

**Inflation:** 11%

**Major industries:** Coffee, seafood, sugar, meat, bananas, food processing, chemicals, metal products, textiles, clothing, petroleum refining and distribution, beverages, footwear

**Major trading partners:** Canada, Japan, Germany, Venezuela, USA, the rest of Central America.

### Environment

The country has three distinct geographic regions: the Pacific lowlands, the north-central mountains and the Caribbean lowlands, also called the Mosquito Coast or Mosquitia. The fertile Pacific lowlands are interrupted by about 40 volcanoes, and dominated by Lago de Nicaragua, which is the largest lake in Central America. The Mosquito Coast is a sparsely populated rainforest area and the outlet for many of the large rivers originating in the central mountains. To date, 17% of the country has been given national-park status.

Lago de Nicaragua supports unusual fish, including the world's only freshwater sharks, as well as a huge variety of bird life. The cloud- and rainforests in the northwest contain abundant wildlife including ocelots, warthogs, pumas, jaguars, sloths and spider monkeys. Avian life in the forests is particularly rich: The cinnamon hummingbird, ruddy woodpecker, stripe-breasted wren, elegant trogon, shining hawk and even the quetzal, the holy bird of the Maya, can all be seen. The jungles on the Caribbean coast contain trees that grow up to almost 200ft (60m) high and are home to boas, anacondas, jaguars, deer and howler monkeys.

### History

The earliest traces of human habitation in Nicaragua are the 10,000-year-old Footprints of the Acahualinca - prints preserved under layers of volcanic ash of people and animals running toward Lago de Managua. Around the 10th century AD, indigenous people from Mexico migrated to Nicaragua's Pacific lowlands, and Aztec culture was adopted by many Indians when Aztecs moved south during the 15th century to establish a trading colony.

The first contact with Europeans came in 1502, when Columbus sailed down the Caribbean coast. In 1522, a Spanish exploratory mission reached the southern shores of Lago de Nicaragua. A few years later the Spanish colonized the region and founded the cities of Granada and



León, subduing local tribes. Granada became a comparatively rich colonial city; León became a hotbed of liberalism. The inhabitants of the heavily populated area around Managua put up a fierce resistance to the Spanish invaders, and their city was destroyed. For the next three centuries Managua was but a village.

Nicaragua gained independence from Spain in 1821, along with the rest of Central America. It was part of Mexico for a brief time, then part of the Central American Federation, and finally achieved complete independence in 1838. Soon after, Britain and the USA both became extremely interested in Nicaragua and the strategically important Río San Juan navigable passage from Lago de Nicaragua to the Caribbean.

In 1934, General Somoza, head of the US-trained National Guard, engineered the assassination of liberal opposition rebel Augusto C Sandino and, after fraudulent elections, became president in 1937. Somoza ruled Nicaragua as a dictator for the next 20 years, amassing huge personal wealth and landholdings the size of El Salvador. Although General Somoza was shot dead in 1956, his sons upheld the reign of the Somoza dynasty until 1979. Widespread opposition to the regime had been present for a long time, but it was the devastating earthquake of 1972, and more specifically the way that international aid poured into the pockets of the Somozas while thousands of people suffered and died, that caused opposition to spread among all classes of Nicaraguans. Two groups were set up to counter the regime: the FSLN (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional, also known as the Sandinistas) and the UDEL, led by Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, publisher of *La Prensa*, the newspaper critical of the dictatorship.

When Chamorro was assassinated in 1978 the people erupted in violence and declared a general strike. The revolt spread and former moderates joined with the FSLN to overthrow the Somoza regime. The Sandinistas marched victoriously into Managua on July 19, 1979. They

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inherited a poverty-stricken country with high rates of homelessness and illiteracy and insufficient health care. The new government nationalized the lands of the Somozas and established farming cooperatives. They waged a massive education campaign that reduced illiteracy from 50% to 13%, and introduced an immunization program that eliminated polio and reduced infant mortality to a third of the rate it had been before the revolution.

It wasn't long before the country encountered serious problems from its 'good neighbor' to the north. The US government, which had supported the Somozas until the end, was alarmed that the Nicaraguans were setting a dangerous example to the region. A successful popular revolution was not what the US government wanted. Three months after Ronald Reagan took office in 1981, the USA announced that it was suspending aid to Nicaragua and allocating US\$10 million for the organization of counter-revolutionary groups known as Contras. The Sandinistas responded by using much of the nation's resources to defend themselves against the US-funded insurgency.

In 1984, elections were held in which Daniel Ortega, the leader of the Sandinistas, won 67% of the vote, but the USA continued its attacks on Nicaragua. In 1985, the USA imposed a trade embargo that lasted five years and strangled Nicaragua's economy. By this time it was widely known that the USA was funding the Contras, often covertly through the CIA, and Congress passed a number of bills that called for an end to the funding. US support for the Contras continued secretly until the so-called Irangate scandal revealed that the CIA had illegally sold weapons to Iran at inflated prices, and used the profits to fund the Contras.

In 1990, Nicaraguans went to the polls and elected Violeta Chamorro, leader of the opposition UNO and widow of martyred *La Prensa* editor Pedro Chamorro. Chamorro's failure to revive the economy, and her increasing reliance on Sandinista support, led to US threats to withhold aid, but the civil war was over at last. Daniel Ortega ran for president in October 1996, apologizing for Sandinista 'excesses' and calling himself a centrist, but he was defeated by the ex-mayor of Managua, anticommunist Liberal Alliance candidate, Arnoldo Alemán. President Alemán was sworn in January 10, 1997.

In November of 1998, Hurricane Mitch trampled the Atlantic coast of Central America, leaving disaster in its wake. Over 10,000 people died as a result of the hurricane, one of the nastiest this century. The tragedy prompted several nations to cancel Nicaragua's debt in late 1999, and the country is slowly rebuilding.

The 2000 mayoral elections saw the Sandinistas gain control of 11 out of 17 departmental capitals, and popular FSLN member Herty Lewites easily won in Managua. However, Liberal Party candidate Enrique Bolanos came out ahead in the presidential election in 2001, beating his Sandinista opponent, former president Ortega. Not giving up on Ortega yet, the Sandinistas renamed him as the party's leader in March 2002.

## Culture

Earthquakes and war have obliterated much tangible evidence of Nicaragua's cultural heritage, especially its colonial architecture - although León retains many fine old buildings. Poetry is one of Nicaragua's most beloved arts, and no other Central American country can match its literary output. Rubén Darío (1867-1916) is known as the 'Prince of Spanish-American literature,' and recent work by Nicaraguan poets, fiction writers and essayists can be found in most bookshops. Bluefields, the largely English-speaking town on the Caribbean coast, is a center for reggae music. The Archipiélago de Solentiname in Lago de Nicaragua is famous as a haven for artists, poets and craftspeople. Sandinista street art in the form of modernist murals is especially prominent in the university town of León.

Spanish is the language of Nicaragua, but English and a number of Indian languages are spoken on the Caribbean coast. The main religion is Catholicism, although there are a number of Protestant sects such as the Pentecostals and the Baptists. The Moravian church, introduced by British missionaries, is important on the Caribbean coast.

A typical meal in Nicaragua consists of eggs or meat, beans and rice, salad (cabbage and tomatoes), tortillas and fruit in season. Most common of all Nicaraguan foods is *gallo pinto*, a blend of rice and beans, with cooking water from the beans added to color the rice. Other traditional dishes include *bajo*, a mix of beef, green and ripe plantains and yucca (cassava), and *vigorón*, yucca served with fried pork skins and coleslaw. Street vendors sell interesting drinks such as *tiste*, made from cacao and corn, and *posol con leche*, a corn-and-milk drink. Nicaragua boasts the best beer and rum in Central America.

Source: [www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)

### NICARAGUA SPECIFIC TEACHING MATERIALS

*The following selected CLAS resources are available for classroom use.*

#### Curriculum Guide

Nicaragua: People, Culture and History (Lessons)

#### Videos

Miracles are Not Enough: Continuity and Change in Religion

Fire in the Mind: Revolutions and Revolutionaries

Americas in Transition

Nicaragua: Nuestra Naturaleza

#### Stories

Nicaragua

Mama Chilaindrá

Coplititas para la Luna

El Taller de las Mariposas

#### Compact Discs

20 Exitos de Música Nicaraguense

For more information contact CLAS at  
(412) 648-7397 or [alinda@ucis.pitt.edu](mailto:alinda@ucis.pitt.edu)

## Delegation of 31 Educators from Pittsburgh Travel to Cuba

by Mark Ginsburg



*Nancy Kodman, Mark Ginsburg and Valerie Couch*



*Classroom in Cuba*



*Jeff Poole in a classroom in Cuba*

During the Thanksgiving week of November 23-30, 2002, thirty-one educators traveled to Havana and Matanzas, Cuba. The group included 22 school teachers, 5 principals, 3 university-based educators, one graduate student from Japan, and one visiting scholar from Korea.

The purpose of the trip was to establish and strengthen educational and professional relations among Pittsburgh, Matanzas, and Havana professionals; learn more about achievements and challenges in education in Cuba; and enhance participants' knowledge of culture, economy, and polity of Cuba.

During the stay in Cuba, teachers and administrators from several school districts in the Pittsburgh area observed and had conversations in schools in Havana and Matanzas; explored life in the cities; and visited museums and other cultural sites. In addition, several panel presentations and seminar discussions were organized to facilitate dialogue between the Pittsburgh delegation and school- and university-based educators.



*Rosalind Eannarino with Cuban musicians*

As a result of the trip participants developed lessons, curricular materials, extra-curricular activities about Cuba. Since the trip to Cuba, several schools in the Pittsburgh area have had special programs that have showcased what the educators learned during their study tour.

Despite the continuing U.S. embargo on trade and travel to Cuba, student and their parents in the Pittsburgh area are gaining access to information about education and society in Cuba, thanks to the efforts of this remarkable group of educators.

This study tour program built on a variety of Cuba studies initiatives developed by the University of Pittsburgh. The trip also grew out of and helped to extend activities that have been developing through sister city (Pittsburgh-Matanzas) and sister state/province (Pennsylvania/Matanzas) projects. The program was the result of collaboration between Mark Ginsburg, Co-Director of the Institute for International Studies in Education (IISE), and Rosalind Eannarino, Outreach Coordinator of the Center for Latin American Studies (CLAS).



*Beth Grunwald with students*

## 24th Annual Latin American & Caribbean Festival

Saturday, October 4, 2003

1:00 p.m. - 11:30 p.m.

William Pitt Union  
University of Pittsburgh

For more information contact: Luz Amanda Villada at  
[lavst12@ucis.pitt.edu](mailto:lavst12@ucis.pitt.edu)

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### SCHOOL VISIT PROGRAM



*Miguel Hernandez and Victoria Abel*

The School Visit Program of the Center for Latin American Studies provides opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Pittsburgh to share their knowledge of Latin America with local K-12 classrooms. The program (which operates from October to April) is open to all K-12 teachers at no cost to the schools.

Presentations are interactive in format and involve students in a discussion based on the experiences and/or observations of the volunteer regarding the country/topic. All presentations are framed in a cultural context. If there is a particular topic that your class is interested in learning more about, feel free to suggest it. The presentations are designed for a regular classroom period of approximately 40 minutes and not to exceed 25 students. Presentations may be in English or Spanish. For more information email Rosalind Eannarino at [alinda@ucis.pitt.edu](mailto:alinda@ucis.pitt.edu).

## *Upcoming Events*

23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Latin American and Caribbean Festival.....Saturday, October 4, 2003

Model United Nations Simulation.....Monday, November 3, 2003

### *Thank you*

from M. Rosalind Eannarino, Outreach Coordinator

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the teachers who participated in CLAS' outreach programs over the past year. A special thank you to: the participants in the research trips to Nicaragua and Cuba; those who contributed to lesson development; all who attended our professional development programs; and the teachers who took time out

of busy schedules to make presentations in various outreach programs. I would also like to express my appreciation to **Manuel Román-Lacayo**, doctoral candidate, Anthropology at the University of Pittsburgh, **Miguel Hernandez**, School Visit Program Coordinator, and **Len Donaldson**, Curriculum Design Consultant. I really enjoyed working with you!!



*Valerie Couch, Sheila Applegate y  
las tres hermanitas Nicaragüenses*



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