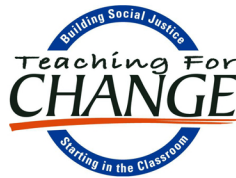


Inside the Volcano: A Curriculum on Nicaragua

Edited by
William Bigelow and Jeff Edmundson



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Teaching for Change, PO Box 73038 Washington, DC 20056
Phone: 202-588-7204 Fax: 202-238-0109 Email: info@teachingforchange.org
www.TeachingforChange.org

Teaching for Change
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Reasons for United States Involvement in Latin America

The question of the purposes served by the United States presence in Nicaragua is a critical one. The traditional explanation given in media and textbooks is that the main U.S. foreign policy goal is to encourage freedom and democracy throughout the world. All current policy debates on Nicaragua rest, at least implicitly, on competing interpretations of past foreign involvements. Historical understanding, thus, has tremendous importance as students sort through contradictory claims about U.S. policy today.

This lesson focuses on the entire Latin America/Caribbean region. Students are presented with a number of quotes from different sources about U.S. policy objectives. They are asked to read the quotes critically, probing for unstated assumptions and the sources of contradiction. Students are also provided relevant economic data to help evaluate the role of the dollar in diplomacy.

Goals/Objectives:

1. Students will evaluate different explanations for U.S. involvement in Latin America.

Time Required

- One and one-half to two class periods.

Materials Needed:

- Handout #4-A: **U.S. Economic Interests in Central America**
- Handout #4-B: **What is the United States Really Concerned About in Latin America?**

Procedure

1. Remind students that the previous lesson (**The United States in Nicaragua: Timeline**) showed that the United States has been deeply involved in Nicaragua for over one hundred years. Ask students to generate some hypotheses about the reasons for this involvement. They needn't believe these theories to be true. They can be explanations students have heard from parents, friends, government leaders, news reports, and the like. List these on the board. If students don't mention "the protection of freedom and democracy," add this as an additional hypothesis.
2. Tell students they are going to evaluate these hypotheses based on what they already know together with

some new information. Distribute Handout #4-A: **U.S. Economic Interests in Central America**. Make sure students are able to interpret the bar graph and understand what the chart on U.S. corporate involvement indicates.

3. Distribute Handout #4-B: **What is the United States Really Concerned About in Latin America?** Tell students this reading combines quotes from U.S. government leaders and other close advisors with those of scholars who have studied Latin America. Point out that some of the statements from government representatives were not made publicly, but come from declassified secret documents. Ask students to consider each individual's priorities — what appears to be the most important

goal for each? Read the quotes aloud with students. Tell them they may find Handout # 4-A: **U.S. Economic Interests in Central America** useful in sorting through each person's statements. Questions for discussion include:

- [US Businessman]: How might this man's freedom come into conflict with other Latin Americans' ideas of freedom?
- [George Kennan]: Why might Kennan not have made this opinion public?
- Based on what you know about U.S. policy towards Latin America, have government leaders followed Kennan's advice? Explain.
- [Theodore Roosevelt]: What does Roosevelt have in mind when he uses the phrase "stable, orderly and prosperous" or "decency in social and political matters"?
- In plain English, what is Roosevelt telling Latin American countries in this quote?
- [Chomsky and Herman]: Do you agree that democracy is not helpful to a favorable business climate?
- [LaFeber]: LaFeber says that the U.S. government's quest for stability in Latin America has led to U.S. support for dictatorships. Do you believe Roosevelt foresaw supporting dictators in order to maintain "stability"?
- [Coolidge]: Do you agree with Coolidge? Are there limits to the kind of "protections" the government should offer?
- [Galeano]: Contrast Galeano's quote with Kennan's. Do they agree?

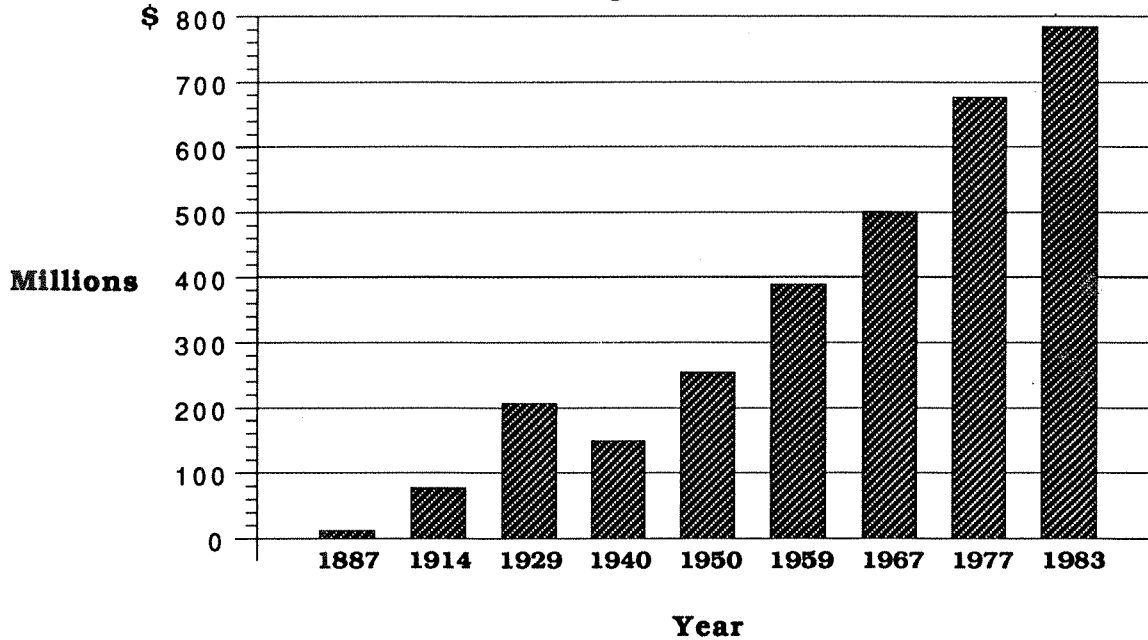
- Simply from reading this brief excerpt, why would you say Galeano titled his book, **Open Veins of Latin America**?
 - [Shultz]: To whom are these commitments made?
 - Who gets to decide what kinds of "economic growth and social justice" are desirable for Latin America?
 - [Beveridge]: What kind of behavior does Beveridge expect from Latin Americans?
 - [Klare]: Evaluate Klare's quote in light of the statements by government leaders included in the reading.
 - [Lappé and Collins]: The quote by Lappé and Collins assumes that the U.S. government fears "revolutionary movements of the poor and hungry." What evidence do you have either to support or refute this claim?
 - Is stopping "revolutionary movements" a legitimate goal of U.S. foreign policy? What do the statements by government leaders have to say about this?
4. Ask students to complete the following in writing:

1. Combine the quotes to arrive at what, in your opinion, is the best explanation for why the United States is involved in Latin America.
2. Which of the quotes is least convincing and why?

Have students work in groups to compare their answers and to develop, if possible, a common explanation or working hypothesis for U.S. involvement in Latin America. Give them an opportunity to share their conclusions with the entire class.

U.S. Economic Interests in Central America

**U.S. Direct Investment in Central America
(excluding Belize and Panama)**



Sources: CEPAL; Survey of Current Business, 1984.

Selected U.S. Corporations with Subsidiaries in Central America

FORTUNE RANK	PARENT COMPANY	COSTA RICA	EL SALVADOR	GUATEMALA	HONDURAS	NICARAGUA
1	Exxon					
4	Texaco					
8	IBM					
13	ITT					
19	US Steel (USX)					
36	Goodyear					
38	Xerox					
48	Monsanto					
56	Coca-Cola					
64	Colgate-Palmolive					
72	Ralston-Purina					
74	Johnson & Johnson					
89	General Mills					
97	United Brands					
108	NCR					
128	Standard Brands					

Sources: *Fortune*, 1985; *Who Audits America*, 1984; *1984 World's Directory of 51,000 Largest U.S. Corporations* The Resource Center, "Compilation of Corporations," 1985.

What is the United States Really Concerned About in Latin America?

“Here (in South America) you have freedom to do what you like with your money; for me, this freedom is worth more than all political and civil freedoms put together.”

• *U.S. businessman, 1953, quoted from Time, Sept 11, 1953*

“We have about 50% of the world’s wealth, but only 6.3% of its population... Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this big difference... To do so, we will have to dispense with all sentimentality and day-dreaming... We need not deceive ourselves that we can afford the luxury of altruism and world-benefaction [doing things only for the good of other people]... We should cease to talk about vague and ... unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of living standards and democratization... The less we are hampered by idealistic slogans, the better.”

• *George Kennan, U.S. State Department classified memo, 1948*

“It is not true that the United States feels any land hunger or entertains any projects as regards the other nations of the Western Hemisphere save such as are for their welfare. All that this country desires is to see the neighboring countries stable, orderly, and prosperous. Any country whose people conduct themselves well can count upon our hearty friendship. If a nation shows that it knows how to act with reasonable efficiency and decency in social and political matters, if it keeps order and pays its obligations, it need fear no interference from the United States.”

• *President Theodore Roosevelt, Message to Congress Dec. 6, 1904*

“Democracy is clearly not helpful to a favorable business climate. As noted by Edward Jessor in a speech to bankers, ‘Quick and tough decisions can be made in a relatively short time in a country such as Brazil compared to the difficulty there is in reaching agreement on what actions to take in a democracy.’”

• *Quoted in Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism*

“For American foreign policy, the idea of requiring Central American governments to pretend to have democratic elections...gave way to the higher priority of stability. As long as the regimes maintained order and protected private property, they were perfectly acceptable. The United States thus accepted, and soon welcomed, dictatorships in Central America because it turned out that such rulers could most cheaply uphold order.”

• *Walter LaFeber, Inevitable Revolutions*

“Americans and their property are a part of the general area of control of the nation, even when abroad. There is a distinct obligation to provide protection to the persons and property of our citizens, wherever they may be.”

• *President Calvin Coolidge, 1925*

“When economic crisis in the United States begins..., the pillage of poor countries must be intensified to guarantee full employment, public liberties, and high rates of development in the rich countries.”

• *Eduardo Galeano, Open Veins of Latin America*

“We will honor our commitment to promote economic growth and social justice in the region [Central America]. We will work to involve others in this effort. And we will uphold and strengthen our commitment to protect our democratic friends from attack or subversion.”

• *Secretary of State George Shultz (under President Reagan), from speech published by State Dept., July 1988*

“... today we are raising more than we [the United States] can consume. Today we are making more than we can use. Today our industrial society is congested; there are more workers than there is work; there is more capital than there is investment... Therefore we must find new markets for our produce, new occupation for our capital, new work for our labor.”

• *Albert J. Beveridge, Speech, Sept. 16, 1898 (subsequently elected United States Senator from Indiana)*

“... the United States has forged an “invisible empire” secured by financial arrangements, business operations, military and economic aid agreements, and the creation of client regimes... Although the specific content of these relationships is constantly [changing], it is possible to identify three major goals of American business operations in the Third World today. The United States needs unhampered access to and control of overseas trade to serve as a market for the products of American industry (and of American-owned plants located abroad), as an outlet for the surplus of U.S. investment funds, and as a source of key raw materials and cheap labor.”

• *Michael T. Klare, author, War Without End, 1970*

[Why does the United States government find Nicaragua so threatening?] “What if Nicaragua does develop differently from so many other revolutions? What if the budding elements of democracy we have

identified... do flower? And what if at the same time the Nicaraguan revolution succeeds in meeting the basic needs of the poor majority for food, housing, and health care? What if the Sandinistas help to teach us all that there could be more than two models of development, that it is possible to make profound structural changes which allow for both democratic participation and justice?

“Perhaps the U.S. government realizes that the potential threat of Nicaragua is not military or economic: it is the threat of a good example which could inspire the majority in so many countries throughout the world who still suffer impoverishment and tyranny similar to that under Somoza. It is the threat of a good example, an example desperately awaited from El Salvador to the Philippines to Poland. Perhaps the U.S. government fears that if the Nicaraguan revolution were allowed to flower it might make it that much harder to defeat revolutionary movements of the poor and hungry throughout the world.”

• *Frances Moore Lappé and Joseph Collins, Now We Can Speak: A Journey Through the New Nicaragua, 1982*

