

Nicaragua's Flower Is in Full Bloom Despite US's Vicious Efforts to Destroy It

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US hegemonic, imperial policy against Nicaragua was clearly established in 1853-54. US pro-slavery President Franklin Pierce sent US Marines to Greytown (San Juan del Norte) to destroy the small city on the Atlantic coast of less than 100 houses because its population refused to cooperate with US robber baron companies constructing rail and transit lines crossing from east to west in Nicaragua utilizing the Rio San Juan Corridor. Greytown was totally destroyed.

Thus, was established the character of US American foreign policy in Central America, including Nicaragua, to the present - contempt for local autonomy, and wanton destruction and murder when locals dare resist.

There have been 49 Nicaragua presidential administrations from 1854 to 1979, when the Sandinista revolution triumphantly marched into Managua ousting the US's long time favorite dictator Somoza. All but one administration, (Zelaya, 1893-1909) had acted as agents of the United States commercial and financial interests. And due to Zelaya's progressive interest in expanding the well-being of all Nicaraguans, he was forcibly removed by the USA in 1909.

After the revolutionary Sandinistas were voted out of power in a 1990 election conducted under threat of continued US war if the US-selected candidate lost, all the revolutionary gains of 1979-1990 were reversed by three US-approved Nicaragua administrations, 1990-2006.

My first visit to Nicaragua was in January 1986 during the middle of Reagan's terrorist war against the people of Nicaragua. I was attempting to study Spanish at a mountain school in Esteli. I had been there only six days when Reagan's Contras attacked three nearby farming cooperatives, murdering 11 campesinos. In addition, the Contras blew up the electrical towers near Esteli plunging the city into darkness. That evening two teenage members of the Nicaragua family I was staying with had been studying their lessons as part of the country's national literacy campaign. They had been practicing using a crude blackboard

with chalk. Without hesitation, they lit candles and continued their lessons as before. The next morning, I watched several of the murdered campesinos carried in open caskets on horse-drawn wagons brought to the Esteli cemetery for all to see. I wept. Viet Nam, all over again, for me.

The next week our class of 20 students took a Saturday trip to one of Nicaragua's many Pacific beaches - Pochomil. While enjoying jumping around in the waves I felt a sharp pain in my right ankle, and my lower right leg became quickly paralyzed up to the knee. I frantically crawled to the beach sands just out of reach of the waves and noticed a neat cascade of blood pouring out of a small cut on my ankle. I couldn't walk so my fellow students and a lifeguard helped me onto our student bus and rushed me the 45 miles to the Antonio Lenin Fonseca, one of the several public hospitals in Managua. I was on a bed in the emergency room with two other seriously wounded Nicaraguans who were experiencing profuse bleeding. The doctor worked frantically on these two patients, using an assistant. The rules of triage were applied here. Of course I had to wait as being the least injured of the three of us. One of the patients actually died while I was waiting for help. But soon the Black doctor, a descendant of British slaves in the Caribbean, speaking excellent English, attended to me and began sucking with his mouth the venom out of my leg. The diagnosis was that I had been stung by a Sting Ray. The effects of the remaining venom would take several days before the pain at the cut site and the leg paralysis subsided. I was given some medicine and a pair of crutches as I left the hospital. When I asked for the bill, the doctor said, "Oh, in revolutionary Nicaragua health care is free". Wow, I said in appreciation.

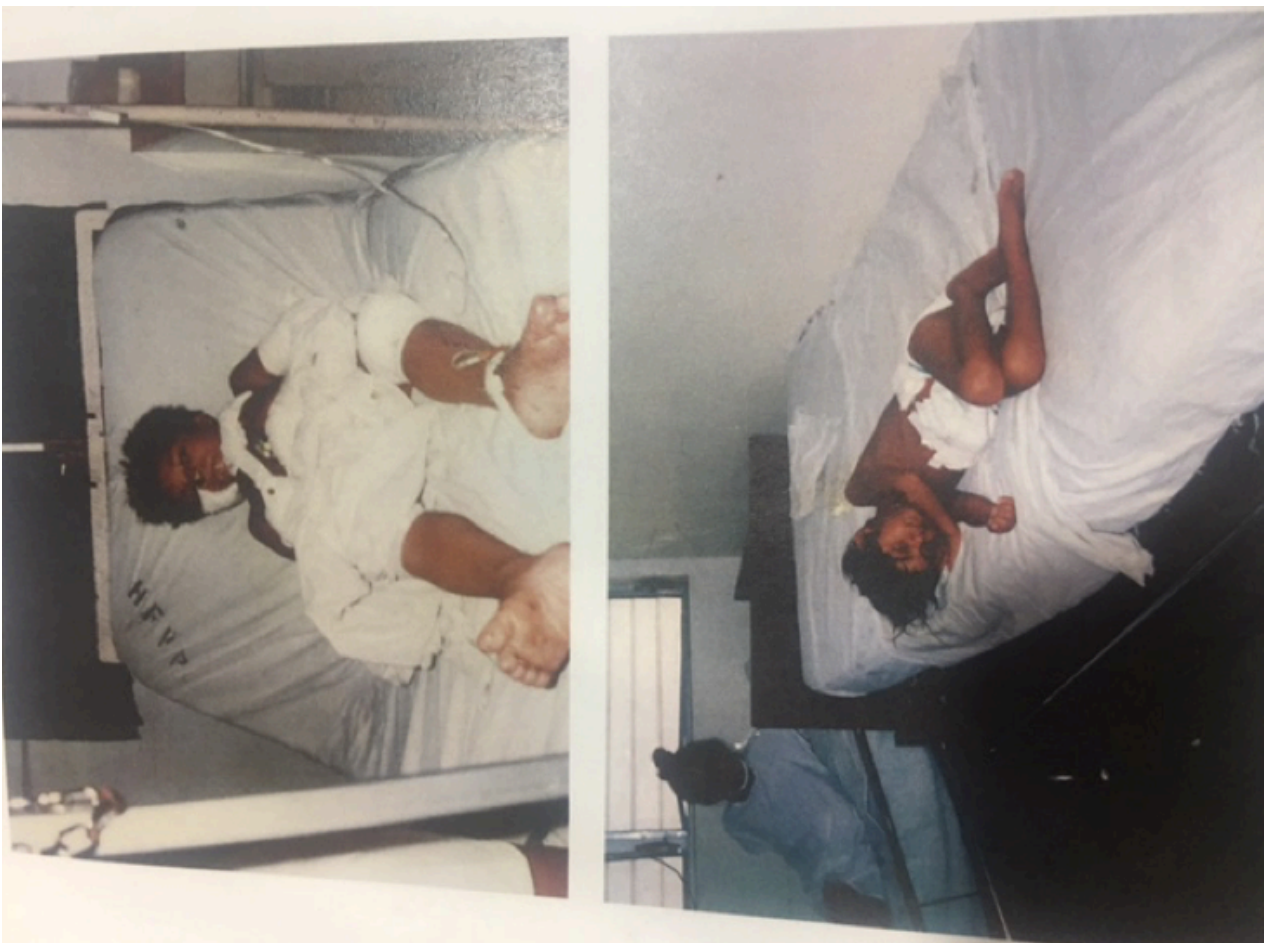
After two months in school I returned to the USA, but subsequently began traveling to Nicaragua a couple of times a year. I continued to document Contra atrocities - murders, arsons, kidnappings, ambushes, and destruction of civilian infrastructure such as farms, health clinics, schools, and the electrical grid.



Witnessing immediate aftermath of Contra ambush, Pantasma Mountain, March 1987



A neighbor boy shows me his father's blood soaked shirt from a Contra ambush in March 1987, Jinotega



Two of thousands of Nicaraguan children injured by Contra attacks; a Managua Hospital 1988

In 1990, I served as an international election observer at the critical February 25, 1990

Nicaragua elections, monitoring vote counting in three small indigenous communities northwest of Puerto Cabezas on the North Atlantic Coast, 330 miles northeast of Managua. I rode in a cattle truck from Matagalpa to Puerto Cabezas to get there. Sitting in the cab I was able to document that all 57 bridges over the rivers on that long stretch of road had been destroyed by the Contras. So the high truck navigated through each of the rivers, having to dodge large rocks on the river bottom.

The villages where I observed had no electricity, and with others I examined the hand-counting of ballots by candlelight into the early morning hours of February 26. Mechanically, the process seemed fair with observers representing the different parties. Later in the day the national results revealed about 55 percent voted for the US-selected UNO/Chamorro candidacy, and 41 percent for FSLN/Ortega. Though terribly disappointed in the results, I understood that the Nicaragua people were voting with a gun pointed at their head since US President Bush had warned the Nicaraguans that a vote for Ortega would translate into continued war and economic deprivation. The mechanical process appeared fair, but the national political context controlled by the US made it impossible for Nicaragua to facilitate a process that would reveal genuinely honest voter sentiments.

When departing for the US from Nicaragua after the elections, the gentleman sitting next to me on the plane was on his last trip as the Sandinista government representative to Europe for Nicaraguan coffee sales. In good English, he sadly shared with me something I have never forgotten: *'It is a shame the US just would not let our flower blossom'*. As the plane was accelerating down the runway lifting into the air, I found myself sobbing, wondering whether I would ever see Nicaragua again."

The results brought welcome, celebratory relief for the wealthy Nicaraguan right-wing and comfortable US investors. They could have their rich playground back. Privatization of services and infrastructure for profit was restored at the expense of the vast majority of the Nicaraguan people. Most of the gains of the revolution, in education, healthcare, gender equity, etc., were reversed.

In subsequent elections in 1996 and 2002, candidates of the Constitutionalist Liberal Party (Arnoldo Aleman, 1996-2001, Enrique Bolanos, 2001-2006), with financial and media help of the USA, defeated efforts by the FSLN (Ortega) to regain the presidency, as they dismantled the earlier Sandinista gains.

Wikileaks cables reveal that the US exerted continued efforts with millions of dollars to block any re-emergence of the Sandinistas, and made clear that if the FSLN were to win, the US threatened to curtail investments, to renew economic sanctions, and to eliminate remittances from the US.

Former Sandinista leader Dora Maria Tellez broke from the FSLN and Ortega in the 1990s and formed the small opposition party MRS (Sandinista Renovation Movement). Tellez made it known that she "believed" the FSLN would commit election fraud in the 2006 elections, warning that if the FSLN "steals" the election, the MRS will "take to the streets". Tellez proudly praised her nephew who was fighting for the US military in Iraq, declaring that she had no political issues with the US, only Nicaragua. Nonetheless, she has been refused a visa to the US because it claims she has a terrorist history.

Before Bolanos left power at the end of 2006, his administration passed a draconian anti-abortion law banning the practice in all circumstances. This horrible policy is often blamed

solely on the FSLN, which regained political power in 2007. Much to the chagrin of the United States, the FSLN has won subsequent elections in 2011, 2016, and 2021.

With the election of the Sandinistas in 2007 to govern Nicaragua, the flower that was so hauntingly extinguished from 1990 to 2006, has reappeared with beautiful blossoms and fragrance despite the constant efforts by the USA to defeat and/or overthrow it.

'It is a shame the US just would not let our flower blossom'. Of course, as would be expected, the US would continue expending hundreds of millions of dollars in various nefarious ways in futile efforts to defeat the Sandinistas in four democratic elections. If this wasn't enough, the US orchestrated a violent *coup d'état* in 2018, that left hundreds dead. However, Nicaragua was able to defeat the coup attempt, and the Nicaraguan flower now shines more brightly and proudly than ever, serving the Nicaraguan people. The US cabal of imperial, greedy oligarchs remain furious, totally ignorant of the understandable hatred most Nicaraguans feel for them.

Erving Vega of the Chicago ALBA Solidarity Group has recently prepared a neat summary, "16 Years of Sandinista Government" [[January 10, 2022](#)] which tells the story clearly. I cannot personally vouch for the statistics, but am repeating them as presented by Erving Vega.

Nicaragua has leaped from one of the worst governments to being one of the best in all of Latin America.

AGENDA	1990-2006 NEOLIBERAL GOVERNMENTS	2007-2023 SANDINISTA GOVERNMENT
1. End of poverty	According to the Living Standard Measurement Surveys, between 2001-2005 general poverty increased from 45.8% to 48.3% and extreme poverty went from 15.1% to 17.2%.	General poverty fell from 48.3% in 2005 to 24.9% in 2016 and extreme poverty fell from 17.2% to 6.9% in the same period.
2. Zero hunger	Famine in rural areas that led to roadside sit-ins, mainly in the north of the country. Chronic malnutrition of 27%.	Food security policy that includes credit, productive bonuses, food packages, school nutrition program, etc. Low chronic malnutrition from 27% to 11.6%.
3. Health and well-being	Privatization through the dismantling of the public health system. Patients had to bring alcohol, gauze, suture thread and sheets if hospitalization was required.	Restitution of free health care that includes laboratory and high-tech tests, medicines and care supplies.
4. Quality education	Lag in coverage and quality determined by: privatization disguised as autonomy, collection of tariffs, abandoned schools and insufficient furniture. 27,000 classrooms destroyed. Thousands of children, mainly in rural areas, had to carry their desks or sit on the floor. The illiteracy rate, which had been reduced to 12.96% with the National Literacy Crusade in 1980, increased between 1990 and 2006 to 22.0%.	Universal access policy determined by: Restitution of free public education. Prohibition of charging school fees. 35,393 school environments built, repaired and/or expanded. The government resumes the task to reduce illiteracy. Currently the rate is between 4% and 6%

5. Gender equality	Position 90 globally in gender equality.	Position 5 globally in gender equality and number 1 in Latin America.
6. Clean water and sanitation	Potable water coverage in the urban area of 65% and in the rural area of 26.7%. Sanitation coverage in the urban area of 36% and in rural area of 33%.	Potable water coverage in the urban area of 91.5% and in the rural area of 55.4%. Sanitation coverage in the urban area of 54% and in the rural area of 50.9%.
7. Affordable and clean energy	Coverage of 54% with blackouts between 12 and 14 hours daily. The generation matrix was 80% with sources derived from petroleum and 20% renewable.	Coverage of 99.32%. The blackouts were overcome during the first months of 2007 after the Sandinista government took office. The generation matrix is 75% with renewable sources and 25% with oil derivatives.
8. Decent work and economic growth.	Net occupancy rate 94.8%. Open unemployment rate 5.2% Permanent conflict workers vs employers. Government-business collusion to breach the Minimum Wage Law.	National net occupancy rate 95.1%. Open unemployment rate 4.9% Agreements between unions and employers. Tripartite agreement and compliance with the Minimum Wage Law.

Nicaragua is the safest country in Central America with a homicide rate that went from 13.4 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2006 to 7 in 2020. Its community-based policing is considered a model for other countries.

Nicaragua possesses the best roads and bridges in Central America. In 2006 there were 2,439 kilometers of paved roads, with only 30% in passable condition. Today, the paved road network exceeds 5 thousand kilometers.

According to "Sustainability Magazine", Nicaragua is ranked number 8 worldwide in promoting policy to generate renewable energy, including geothermal, hydro, and solar.

It now has the best and most expansive public health care and hospital network in Central America with 1,596 health units. It has the lowest coronavirus death rate by far than any other Latin America country, doing so with widespread community education and vaccination programs, and without mandating lockdowns, vaccinations or the wearing of face masks. Some simply chose not to have the vaccinations for personal reasons. Nonetheless, virtually all public and most private employees voluntarily wear masks, and most have been vaccinated at least twice. The country is 90 percent food sufficient.

The reduction in maternal deaths is remarkable. In 2006 the rate was 93 deaths per 100,000 live births, currently it is 31.4. Infant mortality dropped from 29 per 1,000 live births in 2006 to 12.6 per 1,000 live births in 2021.

Despite these various and progressive features of Nicaragua's progressive society, the US incredibly still considers Nicaragua, along with Progressive Venezuela and Cuba, the troika of tyranny. This reveals the stupidity and ignorance of US policy makers. The blooming Nicaragua flower has survived the world economic crisis in 2008, the US-orchestrated coup attempt in 2018, a global pandemic, two Category 4 hurricanes within two weeks of each other in November 2020, and severe US-imposed sanctions.

In 2017, at age 76, I decided to move to Nicaragua to enjoy its cultural and service

amenities. I wanted to live in a country that is openly committed to peace, and regularly and accurately describes the United States as a bully, imperial power. Nicaragua's flower is a special bloom. I purchased a home in the historic city of Granada, and enjoy free health care. I have had four successful surgical operations, and enjoy a personal, experienced doctor. I hire my own personal trainer in efforts to keep my aging body from further deteriorating. I watch sports and documentary programs on television. I eat well and live comfortably on my VA disability and social security. As some may know, I regularly post political and personal content on my Facebook page (yes, I know it is surveillance capitalism at its worst).

By being fully present in Nicaragua, and an active member of the Nicaragua Historical Combatants for Peace, and the Organization of Revolutionary Disabled, I have been able to travel around Nicaragua visiting different communities. As I had experienced in Viet Nam, what and how the mass media and Silicon Valley social media report events and politics, is generally the exact opposite of the truth on the ground. How can this be? Enjoy the post-truth, post-fact world, which is a good reason to live outside the United States, at least for part of your life.



I am at the modern Fernando Velez Paiz hospital in Managua on Tuesday, January 24, 2023, for a followup to a recent surgery on my eyes. The hospital is celebrating its fifth anniversary, and I pose with my Doctor, Erick Uriarte, on the left, and the hospital Director General on the right, Doctor Virginia Garcia. This is one of 32 public hospitals in Nicaragua. Since 2007 when the Sandinistas returned to govern, they have constructed 24 new

hospitals. Twelve more are planned to be constructed by 2026. Universal public health care is guaranteed for Nicaraguans. Throughout the country, there are nearly 1,600 total health care units, that includes many local clinics, special needs and maternity facilities.

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Featured image: Photo of Brian Speaking on September 1st, 2022, Accepting the "Doctor Honoris Causa in Humanidades" from the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua (UNAN), Managua Nicaragua

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