

Immigration (Case Study - Nicaragua)

Level: High School/College

Latin America and the Caribbean from a Global Perspective



A Resource Guide for Teachers

Pedro R. Bermúdez and Bárbara C. Cruz



Latin American and Caribbean Center
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(Originals in gray loose-leaf binder)

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Knowledge of Global Dynamics

EL NORTE

Rationale

Traditional approaches to the teaching of immigration in American history have tended to emphasize factors that have pulled people to the United States. These have included such things as political freedom and democracy, economic opportunity, education, and in general, the chance for a better life. The study of why people come to America also offers an opportunity to introduce students to the harsh realities that push so many in the Third World to leave familiar surroundings, family and friends, and embark on difficult and dangerous treks towards the dream of a better life. For many in Latin America, this has meant the trip to "el Norte" (the North--the United States and Canada).

Objectives

The student will:

1. analyze the phenomenon of immigration to the United States in terms of chronology, nationalities, motivations, and experiences;
2. identify reasons that explain Nicaraguan citizens' decision to migrate to the United States and Canada;
3. differentiate between "pull" and "push" factors contributing to the recent influx of Nicaraguans into the United States, Canada, and specifically, Dade County.

Key Concepts

Migration/emigration/immigration, push factors, pull factors, Sandinistas, contras, interdependence, human choices

Infusion Area

American history

Materials Needed

"Background Notes on Nicaragua"
"Background Notes on Nicaragua" (student worksheet)
"Many Flee Troubled Nicaragua"

Suggested Time

Two class periods

Learning Activities

Suggested Activities for Day 1:

1. Ask students to brainstorm as many reasons as possible that might provide answers to the question: Why do people move? List student responses on the board. After five to ten minutes conclude the brainstorming session and ask students to come up with categories under which to subsume reasons listed on the board. Write the categories on the board (e.g., economic, political, educational, religious, etc.) and ask students to tell you under which category to place items from the list.
2. Explain to the class that usually the decision to leave one's country or place of residence is not an easy one. Ask students if they have ever done this and ask them to share their experience with classmates. Add that these decisions are often the result of "pull" factors (things that attract the person to where he/she is going--freedom, opportunity, jobs, education, etc.) and "push" factors (things that the person is trying to get away from--oppression, hunger, poverty, unemployment, etc.). Ask students to review the list of categories and reasons on the board, identify, and explain which of these might be "pull" and/or "push" factors. Point out that often these decisions are a result of the interaction of both push and pull factors (the teacher should keep a record of the pull/push factors identified by students for use in day 2).
3. Distribute "Background Notes on Nicaragua" and allow students time to begin reading the material through a sustained silent reading period. Ask them to finish the material for the following class session and to complete the identification items on the worksheet provided for homework.

Suggested Activities for Day 2:

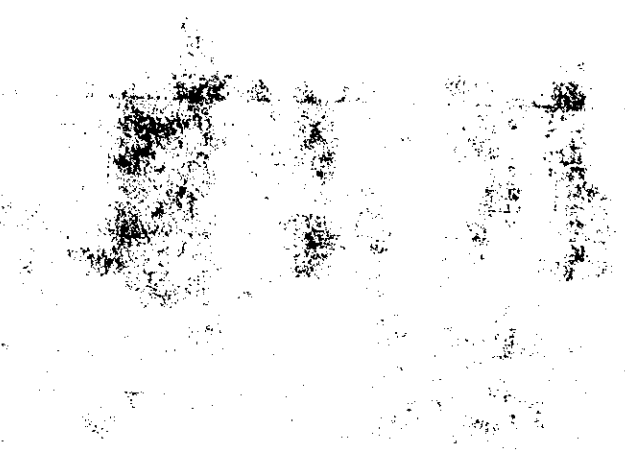
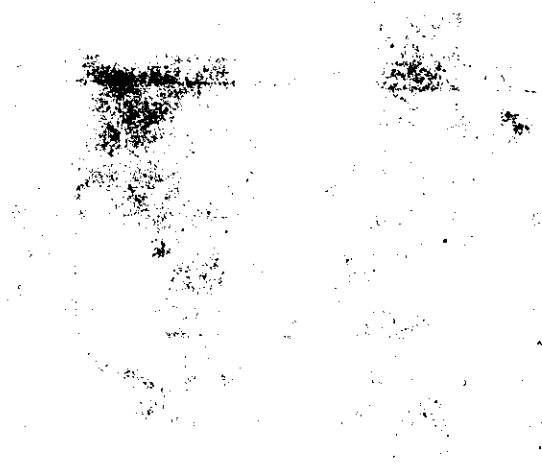
1. Distribute "Many Flee Troubled Nicaragua" and ask students to read the article carefully, underlining each of the reasons given for the migration of Nicaraguans into North America, especially the United States and Canada. Students should label each of the reasons as either "pull" or "push" and be prepared to support their choices. After students complete this part of the activity, write student responses on the board for everyone to view.
2. Write the list of "pull" and "push" factors that was derived from activity #2 in day 1. Ask students to compare similarities and differences in both lists.
3. Conclude lesson by having students make observations about what "push" factors tell us about living conditions in Nicaragua. Ask students to consider the following questions:
 - a. In what ways might focusing on "push" factors help us to better understand immigration issues facing the United States today?
 - b. How might this information contribute to a better understanding of immigration patterns in American history?
 - c. What might you predict about the future of Latin American immigration into the United States?

Assessment

Have each student write a short fictional account of what it might be like for a Nicaraguan student to decide to make the trip to "el Norte."

Additional Activities

Have students conduct research into why other Latin Americans (Colombians, Guatemalans, Haitians, Hondurans, Cubans, etc.) are also coming into the United States. Ask students to compare and contrast "push" factors affecting each of these groups.



Nicaragua. In 1909, the United States sent a naval force to intervene in Nicaragua after two Americans were executed. U.S. marines stayed in Nicaragua off and on until 1933. Before leaving, the marines trained General Anastasio Somoza Garcia to lead a national guard. Somoza used the guard to assassinate guerrilla leader Augusto Sandino, to overthrow liberal President Juan Batista Sacassa, and to establish a military dictatorship. During the next forty-five years, three Somozas ruled Nicaragua—Anastasio Somoza and his two sons, Luis Somoza Debayle and Anastasio Somoza Debayle. The Somozas were so undemocratic and corrupt that, by 1978, many Nicaraguan peasants, business leaders, and members of the middle class had ceased to support the regime.

The Sandinistas. On July 20, 1979, after a two-year civil war, the Somoza regime was overthrown by a popular opposition movement made up of a procommunist group—known as the Sandinista National Liberation Front—and several other political factions representing both the poor and the middle class. A new Government of National Reconstruction was formed. Although the Sandinistas played a major role, the new government included representatives of the private business sector and the middle class. The new government said it would spurn "American-style" capitalism and "Soviet-style" communism and follow a third way: a part-socialist and part-capitalist economy with political pluralism—many political groups instead of one.

Despite strong opposition from the United States and antigovernment rebels (*contras*) fighting in the countryside, the Sandinista government has remained in power. Significant reforms have been instituted in education and land ownership. Elections have also been held, although the United States considers them to be fraudulent. The Nicaraguan government has also established ties with Cuba and the Soviet Union. In response to Nicaragua's procommunist government, the Reagan administration has strongly backed the *contra* forces and enacted a trade embargo against the Sandinistas.

The Iran/Contra Scandal. In November 1986, Attorney General Edwin Meese revealed that a White House staff member, Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North, had secretly sent millions of dollars to the *contras* in Nicaragua. According to Meese, North diverted profits from secret arms sales between the United States and Iran to the rebels. This diversion of funds came at a time when Congress had banned U.S. aid to the *contras*. Further details revealed that between 1984 and 1986, administration officials had organized a secret network of private citizens and foreign government officials to fund the *contras*. The resulting scandal damaged public confidence in the president and jeopardized future funding for the *contras*.

In response to the scandal, Congress created two special committees to investigate the secret *contra* funding network. The committees were to examine:

- whether laws were broken in funding the *contras*;
- whether there was a "cover up" of evidence after the Iran/*contra* "connection" was revealed; and
- whether high-ranking government officials, including the president, were involved in providing money for the *contras*.

The Reagan administration welcomed the establishment of the investigative committees. The administration said that the investigations would show that only a few government officials, acting on their own initiative, had run the *contra* aid network. But many members of Congress and the press were skeptical. They wondered how a small number of people could plan and run such an operation without the knowledge of the Department of State, the Department of Defense, the Central Intelligence Agency, or the president:

Does the Sandinista Government Threaten Our National Security? President Reagan believes that the Sandinistas in Nicaragua pose a "mortal threat to the entire New World." According to the president, the Sandinistas have given weapons to radical forces in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. He warns that if the Sandinistas are not checked, unrest and revolution could engulf Central America and Mexico. President Reagan also says that the Soviet Union supplies the Sandinistas with military and economic aid and that Nicaragua may allow the Soviets to build a naval base there. He warns that the Sandinistas could block vital sea lanes that carry almost half of our exports and more than half of our imported oil.

Opponents of President Reagan's policies in Central America believe that the Sandinistas do not threaten the United States. They say that Nicaragua is a small country that cannot begin to match the military and economic might of the United States. According to critics, President Reagan has invented a Sandinista "threat" to build public support for overthrowing a government he dislikes. They claim that there is no evidence that the Soviet Union is building a naval base in Nicaragua. Moreover, critics say that Nicaragua has only taken aid from the Soviet Union and Cuba because the United States is unwilling to help. They claim that the Sandinistas are sensitive to U.S. concerns in the region. For example, after the United States pressured the Sandinistas to end their support of the antigovernment rebels in El Salvador in 1981, the flow of weapons to the rebels slowed to a trickle. Nicaragua knows that if it ever became a clear and direct threat to U.S. interests, the United States would take decisive military action against it.

Should the United States Support the *Contras*? President Reagan believes that the structure of the Sandinista government must be changed. To do this, the president wants to give military aid to the *contras*, who are waging a war against the Sandinistas. Reagan believes that the *contras* offer the best hope for freedom and democracy in Nicaragua, calling them "freedom fighters."

President Reagan says that he is not seeking to overthrow the Sandinista government, only to force the Sandinistas to end their repression of individual rights and to allow democratic elections to be held. He claims that the Sandinistas have betrayed the 1979 Nicaraguan revolution that brought them to power. According to the president, the Sandinistas have harassed the Catholic Church, limited the participation of competing political parties, reduced the freedom of the press, and curtailed other civil rights. Reagan says that more and more dissatisfied Nicaraguans are joining the *contras* and that other countries in the region support his policies. He warns that if we abandon the *contras*, the United States may eventually have to send American soldiers to Central America to stop the spread of communism.

Congressional opposition to the president's support of the *contras* is strong. Some members of Congress believe that we have no right to interfere in the affairs of Nicaragua simply because we find its policies distasteful. They say that the Nicaraguan people have a right to choose their own type of government and their own leaders. Members of Congress are also concerned about human rights violations allegedly committed by the *contras* and wonder whether the *contras* would be harsher rulers than the Sandinistas. In addition, some critics claim that the *contras* have no hope of toppling the Sandinista government because the *contras* lack support from the Nicaraguan people. The only way a military solution could succeed is if the United States uses its own troops.

Plans for Peace. Many Latin American countries believe that the conflict in Nicaragua can best be solved through diplomatic means, rather than through military conflict. During the last five years, leaders from several countries have met to discuss how peace can best be achieved.

Contadora Peace Plan. In 1983, leaders from four countries—Colombia, Mexico, Panama, and Venezuela—met on the island of Contadora to draft a plan for achieving peace in Nicaragua. The Contadora peace plan calls for: (1) ending all arms imports into Central America; (2) expelling all foreign military advisors, including those from the United States; (3) prohibiting aid to guerrilla movements; (4) prohibiting foreign military maneuvers; and (5) limiting the size of Central American armies. Although the Contadora peace plan is aimed at settling the conflict in Nicaragua, all Central American countries would be bound by these terms.

Despite several meetings of the Contadora group since 1983, the Sandinistas and the United States have not agreed to the terms of this treaty. Both countries say that they will negotiate their differences only when certain conditions are met. The United States insists that the Sandinistas must first open talks with the *contras*, while the Sandinistas say the United States must first end its support for the *contras*.

Critics of the U.S. position claim that President Reagan is avoiding negotiations in the hope that the *contras* will win their war against the Sandinistas. But President Reagan says that he supports a negotiated settlement and that it is Nicaragua that is foiling his efforts. He points out that the United States was the largest donor of aid to Nicaragua from 1979 to 1980 but that the Sandinistas rebuffed the United States in favor of the Soviet Union. The Reagan administration also claims that other Central American countries privately support U.S. policies but are afraid to say so publicly because it would anger Nicaragua, which has the largest army in the region. Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega claims that President Reagan is trying to fool the American people into supporting a military solution to the problems of Central America so that the United States can control the region.

Costa Rican Peace Plan. In 1987, the government of Costa Rica proposed a new peace plan to replace the Contadora plan. The Costa Rican plan calls for the government of Nicaragua to: (1) declare a ceasefire with the *contra* rebels, (2) hold free elections, and (3) allow complete freedom of the press. The plan also calls for a complete cutoff of aid to all rebel movements in Central America, including those in El Salvador and Guatemala, and an overall reduction in the size of Central American armies. A commission drawn from the United Nations, the Organization of American States, and the Contadora group would supervise the plan.

Many members of Congress support the Costa Rican plan. They believe that the Contadora peace plan will not work and that it is the countries of Central America who are in the best position to solve their own problems. However, the Sandinista government has denounced the Costa Rican plan. The Sandinistas say that the Costa Rican plan supports U.S. efforts to overthrow the Nicaraguan government and subverts the efforts of the Contadora group, which the Sandinistas believe to be free from U.S. influence.

Outlook

Increasing American Presence In the Region. Since 1980, the United States has increased its presence in Central America by increasing its aid and by introducing American forces there. For example, U.S. military advisors help train the Salvadoran army and American helicopters have carried Honduran troops into combat. Some experts fear that the growing American presence could lead the United States into a war similar to our disastrous involvement in Vietnam.

The American presence is especially strong in Honduras, where American soldiers have constructed airfields, roads, bridges, and training bases. The military has also conducted large-scale maneuvers there. Since 1983, there have rarely been fewer than 1,000 U.S. troops stationed in Honduras, and tens of thousands of others have participated periodically in military exercises. The strong U.S. presence has placed Honduras in a difficult position. On the one hand, Honduras wants the aid and protection provided by the United States and the spending that the bases and maneuvers pump into the economy. On the other hand, Honduras realizes that Nicaragua views the U.S. presence with alarm. Honduras fears that the United States may use their country for an invasion of neighboring Nicaragua.

Civil wars, revolutions, coups, poverty, and unjust economic and political systems have plagued Central America for many years, and the situation probably will not improve soon. The question for the United States is: Can Congress and the president agree on a policy to deal with injustice and upheaval in Central America, especially in Nicaragua? President Reagan is determined to stop the spread of communism in the region and supports sending military aid to strengthen anticommunist forces there. Many members of Congress believe that the real enemies in Central America are economic and social problems, which cannot be defeated with guns. They are reluctant to send increased military aid, especially in light of the Iran/*contra* scandal, and have vowed to seek a more peaceful solution to the problems in Central America.

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

PERIOD: _____

BACKGROUND NOTES ON NICARAGUA

WORKSHEET

1. Summarize, in writing, the relations between the United States' government and Nicaragua during the years of 1909-1979.

2. List the reasons given as pros and cons to the question of whether the Sandinista government threatens American national security.

Pro

Con

3. Define the following terms briefly.

a. Somozas

b. Sandinistas

c. Iran/Contra Scandal

d. Contadora Peace Plan

e. Costa Rican Peace Plan

MANY FLEE TROUBLED NICARAGUA

Fear Sandinistas, chaotic economy

By Sam Dillon
Herald Staff
Writer

MANAGUA, Nicaragua -- Nicaraguans are streaming out of their country in an exodus authorities attribute to economic chaos and the dawning realization that the Sandinistas are firmly entrenched in power at the close of the Reagan administration.

Across this battered country, from the barrios of Managua to Pacific coast fishing towns and cattle marketing villages of the highlands, Nicaraguans are selling homes and goods to flee the country on foot and in buses, by car and by plane.

"Six months ago the belief that Nicaragua could change was sustaining the people, but now they've lost all hope. Nicaragua is going to remain in the Soviet camp, and people are looking for escape," Dr. Alberto Saborio, president of the Nicaraguan Bar Association, said in an interview.

Thousands of nearly frantic Nicaraguans mobbed migration offices

early this month after news leaked of government plans to quadruple the price of a new passport to double the monthly salary of a skilled worker.

About a dozen new bus companies have sprung up in recent months to cash in on the burgeoning emigrant traffic to Guatemala, the only Central American country to which Nicaraguans can travel without a visa.

The emigrants include doctors, lawyers, engineers and other professionals as well as vendors, and skilled and unskilled workers.

The Sandinistas have laid off at least 20,000 state employees this year and devalued the currency three times. Inflation is out of control, estimated at several thousand percent annually.

"Working people simply can't live here anymore," said Pablo Barbosa, 47, owner of a 10-worker glue factory in Managua.

Carlos Manuel Morales, the Sandinista governor of three northern provinces, acknowledged the mounting emi-

gration.

"I think the reasons are more economic than political," Morales said.

"Some may believe their opportunities for personal accumulation are better in the United States or Canada."

Others pointed to political factors.

"Nicaraguans are realizing that the U.S. is not going to send in the Marines, and that communism is going to consolidate.

They say, 'If that's the case, then I'm leaving.'" said a diplomat who has interviewed Nicaraguans about why they are deciding to emigrate.

The U.S. Congress cut off military aid to the contra rebels in February. Since Sandinista-contra peace negotiations broke down in June, the Sandinistas have largely abandoned the democratic rhetoric that was in fashion here after the signing of a 1987 peace pact. They have jailed scores of Sandinista opponents, seized several private farms and intermittently sanctioned the media.

They have recently targeted Roman Catholic Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo with a harassment campaign.

Many apolitical Nicaraguans who have lived in uneasy coexistence with the Sandinista revolution for nine years are pulling up stakes. In addition, a significant number of state workers who, until now, have appeared to sympathize with Sandinista policies are also suddenly emigrating.

Emigrants in recent weeks from Esteli, a town north of Managua, have included the head of the local education ministry, the son of a founding member of the Sandinista Front in the region, and the top administrator of a state-run tobacco enterprise. The latter, an agricultural engineer, left Nicaragua after being promised a job milking cows for a living in Costa Rica, according to his friends.

"It's a fever-- they're leaving in such alarming quantities," said Gustavo Barrantes, an Esteli lawyer. Barrantes said emigrants in the

(Reprinted with permission of the Miami Herald.)

past have been mainly male teenagers avoiding military service, but now entire families are leaving."

As Barrantes talked to an American reporter last week, another lawyer, 37, wearing jeans and sunglasses, burst breathlessly into his Estelí legal offices.

"They just sent papers to my office ordering me into the army reserves," he said. "I've decided -- I'm going to Los Angeles." The lawyer said that since many of his clients have emigrated he had been considering his own departure.

The president of the Estelí Bar Association, Byron Largaespada, emigrated to Canada last month. In an interrogation, state security police tried to link him to an alleged CIA plot.

"La Seguridad will never be able to call me in again," Largaespada told associates at his departure.

To the east, in the provincial capital of Jinotega, residents reported that since the emigration to the United States in September of one

prominent physician, three other doctors have resigned from the local Sandinista-run hospital and are preparing to emigrate.

Another powerful Jinotega citizen preparing to leave was until recently the Sandinistas' regional director of a major state-run export company. The head of Jinotega's Social Christian Party in Jinotega also emigrated to Canada recently, party officials said.

The wife of a Sandinista deputy in the National Assembly is seeking a U.S. visa to emigrate, according to another deputy, an oppositionist, who said he is helping her with the arrangements and showed a reporter the woman's Nicaraguan passport.

A reporter's interview with the opposition deputy at a home in a rural town was interrupted when the local distributor of Barricada, the Sandinista daily newspaper, knocked at the deputy's door. The distributor, preparing to emigrate, was seeking advice about how to arrange travel documents to Canada.

Canada is the destination of

choice now because Nicaraguans can travel there as tourists, then elect to stay on with a chance for permanent residence, according to Ligia Monge, an official at Canada's embassy in Costa Rica.

The U.S. Consulate in Managua has been closed since the Sandinistas expelled eight U.S. diplomats in July. Officials at the U.S. Embassy in Guatemala City said that hundreds of Nicaraguans each week apply for U.S. visas there. More travel on through Mexico to enter the U.S. illegally.

"Reagan is leaving -- and the Revolution stays!" says a Managua billboard. Many Managuans, however, are not staying.

Rosa Guido, 48 stood in Managua's Miraflores neighborhood last week. For a reporter, she pointed north along a dirt street to the empty house left behind by the Uriarte family, which recently departed for New York. She pointed south, to the house emptied when the Barreto family left for Costa Rica, then west, beneath a setting

sun, to the house evacuated by a truck driver who took his family to Houston last month.

"Generally they make their plans quietly, and then they leave. You don't know it until suddenly they're gone," Guido said.