

Review / Reseña

Jarquín, Mateo. *The Sandinista Revolution: A Global Latin American History*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2024. 336 pp.

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The United States' involvement in counterinsurgency efforts in Central America has been a central focus of the literature regarding the Sandinista Revolution. Readers of Mateo Jarquín's *The Sandinista Revolution: A Global Latin American History* will be intrigued to encounter a concise and nuanced telling of the Sandinista Revolution and its international legacy that effectively de-centers the United States. Whereas previous studies of the Nicaraguan Revolution have focused their attention on U.S. support for the authoritarian regime of Anastasio Somoza Debayle (r. 1967-1972; 1974-1979) as well Ronald Reagan's financial support for the Contras, Jarquín looks beyond the shadow of U.S. imperialism and toward the broader international influences that informed and responded to the shifting governing practices of Sandinista leadership throughout the 1980s. This unique frame of inquiry allows readers to grasp the full dimensions of what the Sandinista Revolution meant for inter-American relations and diplomacy and how international and the Frente

Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) leaders worked to maintain national sovereignty in the face of violent foreign intervention.

While anti-Somoza attitudes in Latin America were on the rise leading up to 1979, Jarquín demonstrates that Anastasio Somoza Debayle's unpopularity was not the only reason that nations flooded support to the Tercerista faction and subsequently maintained some of their support for the Sandinista government. Despite characterizations by the United States that Nicaragua would be the new epicenter of communist influence in Latin America, Jarquín argues that leaders in the Soviet Union and Cuba were skeptical of the Sandinista revolution's socialist market economy. Rather, it was leaders of other Latin American nations—namely Venezuela, Costa Rica, Mexico, and Panama—who supported the Nicaraguan people's demands for regime change. Jarquín's attention to why leaders that represented various ideological tendencies felt compelled to intervene in diplomatic relations on behalf of the Sandinista government demonstrates the Revolution's centrality to South-South relations towards the end of the Cold War.

The book is divided into four parts, which outline different phases in FSLN leadership, from the 1979 overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship to the eventual transfer of power following the results of the 1990 election. In Chapter 1 of the book, the author demonstrates how internal opposition to the Somoza dictatorship challenged long-held Somocista tendencies in Nicaragua. This chapter also illustrates how state terror and the assassination of liberal journalist Pedro Joaquín Chamorro created the conditions for cooperation among anti-Somoza liberals and leftists who eventually formed the Tercerista tendency. This coalition also facilitated support for the Revolution among important regional neighbors like Panama and Venezuela, where political leaders felt that the FSLN's willingness to coalesce with moderates demonstrated their likeliness to share power with groups across political aisles. In Chapter 2, Jarquín examines how regional state actors supported the Revolution leading to the 1979 insurrection. The Revolution's allies, which included nations like Mexico and Venezuela, did not have the same vision and political ideologies as top FSLN leaders, but they did agree that combating the United States' aggression in Central America meant supporting Nicaraguan self-determination. Furthermore, their support granted the Revolution legitimacy in the regional context, which FSLN leaders understood to be necessary to facilitate the social transformation of Nicaraguan society following the successful overthrow of the dictatorship.

In Part 2 of the book, comprising Chapters 3 and 4, Jarquín demonstrates how the process of state consolidation was a particularly polarizing process within the domestic and regional spheres. The coalition among moderates and FSLN revolutionaries quickly fell apart as the Sandinistas began expanding their power within the *junta* charged with reconstructing Nicaragua. In the international context, the Revolution acquired varying degrees of support from nation-states around the globe. As the United States worked to articulate Nicaragua as the new epicenter of communist influence, liberal democracies and socialist states in Europe and elsewhere in the Americas increasingly challenged this assertion. Moreover, FSLN leaders recognized that to maintain the legitimacy they acquired from actors in the international community, they would also need to make certain concessions.

The Contra War and its local dimensions are the subject of Part 3. Historians have struggled with classifying the war as one of regime change imposed by the United States or a civil war led by internal opponents of the Sandinista government. Chapter 5 synthesizes several nuances that explain why *campesinos* and former allies participated in counterrevolutionary insurgency. The chapter also interrogates the conditions that made the war particularly difficult for revolutionary and counterrevolutionary forces alike. While the FSLN struggled to maintain their base of support amidst a particularly gruesome war, the Revolution also garnered international sympathy as another victim of U.S. intervention. Chapter 6 demonstrates how FSLN leadership responded to global pressures during the Contra War. Neighboring political leaders involved in the Contadora Peace Process asserted their support for self-determination in Central America. The 1984 elections, however, failed to secure an end to the war due to reservations by leadership across different political aisles. Furthermore, the attitudes of socialist nations like Cuba and the U.S.S.R. towards what policies Nicaragua should adopt further complicate readings of the political struggle and geopolitics through the Cold War paradigm that, for many, came to define the outcome of the Cuban Revolution. Jarquín demonstrates that, like Mexico, leaders in Cuba and the U.S.S.R. encouraged Nicaragua to adopt a mixed economy and political pluralism. This was partly due to inter-Soviet political and economic turmoil that could not secure the support of another socialist project as it had done in Cuba.

Part 4 of the book outlines the history of the Central American Peace Accords. Jarquín argues that Central American governments made major concessions to secure the prospect of peace. FSLN leaders recognized that they would be unable to maintain the international legitimacy and domestic support necessary to combat

the Contra and continue the war. Beyond delineating South-South solidarity and tensions, Chapters 7 and 8, which outline Nicaragua's centrality to the Central American Peace Accords process, illuminate how the FSLN's diplomatic presence and concessions during this process helped determine specific regional diplomatic policies in Central America. Jarquín's centering of the Esquipulas Accords argues that Sandinista involvement demonstrated the growing recognition of FSLN leadership within the hemisphere and de-legitimized the United States' role as architects of democratization in Central America. Ultimately, these concessions would include the peaceful transfer of power following Daniel Ortega's defeat in the 1990 election.

In addition to Jarquín's intervention in the study of Cold War Latin America and regional diplomatic politics, the study's use of oral testimonies and close readings of memoirs by FSLN leaders grants readers a critical understanding of how these actors grappled with the political climate and the challenges that prevented the fruition of the socialist project they had envisioned. Instead, the Nicaraguan Revolution and the counterinsurgency that followed the FSLN's rise to power unexpectedly precipitated the establishment of an economically liberal democracy. In contrast to previous studies, Jarquín's contextualization of this trajectory highlights the Sandinista Revolution's significance as a social upheaval but also as a bridge toward an electoral democracy. By shedding light on the various political influences that shaped the outcome of the Revolution, this study points to the limitations of viewing the Revolution as another product of the Cold-War paradigm. A global shift towards democratization and growing opposition to U.S. intervention in Latin America created networks of support for the Revolution within the international community. I look forward to scholars taking up Mateo Jarquín's invitation for future studies of Central America that situate cultural, racial, and, I might add, gendered politics in the later and Post-Cold War periods, and explore how these dynamics informed larger regional and global trends.