

UCLA

UCLA Historical Journal

Title

Arturo Cruz Jr., *Memoirs Of A Counterrevolutionary, Life With the Contras, The Sandinistas, and The CIA*. New York: Doubleday, 1989 xvi + 267 pp.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1mb8j587>

Journal

UCLA Historical Journal, 9(0)

Authors

Charlip, Julie
Restall, Matthew

Publication Date

1989

Copyright Information

Copyright 1989 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

Yet too infrequently does Cohen differentiate amongst these civilized societies. The addition of geographical and historical approaches may have added an important dimension to the work which could address the crucial question of European ascendancy at the expense of a number of other civilizations. The dominance of the Europeans over Mesoamerican and Andean civilizations is one of the most obvious omissions. The works of William McNeill (1976) and Alfred Crosby (1872, 1986), in particular, are good starting points in helping us see the relationships between history and ecology. As these studies demonstrate the particularities of history and place-specific ecology matter much in accounting for the structures of modern civilization.

The multidisciplinary approach has for Cohen an additional benefit: individual disciplines often take for granted certain assumptions which if posed as questions might otherwise prove to be embarrassingly revealing. The author is seeking to challenge those assumptions; but more importantly he wishes to implicitly challenge the assumption of progress as a necessary outcome of civilization. For those of us concerned with questions of underdevelopment, this is a particularly relevant undertaking. It is almost second nature for underdevelopment specialists to raise a question like: Progress for whom and at whose expense? Yet for colleagues in other fields these kinds of questions may never surface. Cohen's book attempts to build bridges to these other fields so that a more dynamic understanding of the immense problem of managing global life support systems becomes possible. For this challenge alone, in light of the ecological sword of Damocles hanging over us, Cohen's book is worthy of our attention.

Steven C. Williams
University of California, Los Angeles

Arturo Cruz Jr., *Memoirs Of A Counterrevolutionary. Life With the Contras, The Sandinistas, and The CIA*. New York: Doubleday, 1989 xvi + 267 pp.

In its first decade the Sandinista revolution has spawned a burgeoning number of books on long-neglected Nicaragua, from in-depth

land-use studies to volumes of speeches by FSLN leader. The vast majority of these have been sympathetic to the Sandinista program and to the post-1979 government, with the opposition maintaining a conspicuous silence.

There are two possible exceptions: *Nicaragua Betrayed*, by Anastasio Somoza and Jack Cox (New Orleans: Western Islands Press, 1981), a memoir by the deposed dictator that is so dishonest and disconnected from reality that it is almost as useless a primary as it is a secondary historical document; and now Arturo Cruz Jr.'s *Memoirs of a counter-revolutionary*, whose 267 pages tell us as little about the author and his country as did the *apologia somocista*.

Cruz is the son of the Sandinista's former ambassador to the United States, who was named opposition presidential candidate in 1984 but withdrawn from the race by Washington officials in an attempt to discredit the elections. The candid memoirs of Cruz Sr. would likely make interesting reading; but then one would have expected that of his son.

Instead we have the ramblings of an admittedly naive son of the bourgeoisie who never fully belonged to any of the camps to which he claimed allegiance in his subtitled *Life with the Contras, the Sandinistas and the CIA*. More grave than his naivete is the problems facing those on both sides of the revolution. The text is replete with *non sequiturs* and gaps in logic and insight. For example, Cruz is incredulous at CIA pressure on the Contras to hold territory; he sees this as something that, by definition, guerrillas do not do, apparently unaware that the FMLN holds one third of the territory of El Salvador.

There is so little first-hand information in this book as to render the title *Memoir* a misnomer. One of Cruz's jobs for the Sandinistas was "father management," although we are told almost nothing of what his father thought and did. In fact Cruz tells us little of his own thoughts and deeds, instead indulging in a lightweight recapping of Nicaraguan history, followed by a series of impressionistic sketches of life with the Sandinistas and Contras.

The first two chapters set the tone, reading like the rejected pages of a bad Gabriel Garcia Marquez novel. Rather than conveying a Nicaragua of magical realism, as seems to be his intent, the author offers a series of disconnected anecdotes and a jumble of family names to which and whom he is only vaguely connected. Herein lies one of the book's

main problems: Cruz is in many ways better qualified to discuss the United States than Nicaragua. He left his native country at the age of 16, carrying with him an apparent paucity of personal memories, and received a U.S. high school and college education. His role as a Sandinista in the revolutionary war of the 1970s consisted of PR in Washington. "I had no intention of either firing a gun or being a target for someone else's" (p. 74). It thus comes as no surprise to learn that after *El Triunfo* of July 19, 1979, Cruz remained in Washington, serving at the Nicaraguan Embassy until 1981.

His credibility is further diminished by the lack of footnotes. For example, his portrait of internecine squabbles among the Sandinistas and the "brutal" security apparatus that they set up, of which he provides no details whatsoever.

Why does Cruz shift his loyalties to the Contras? Clearly he is not telling: His statement that the Nicaraguan economy was in shambles by 1982 defies all evidence (it was the strongest of Central America until the U.S. embargo of May 1985, according to University of Texas economist Michael Conroy); the alleged cult of personality among the FSLN leaders has for a decade escaped attention of even those observers looking for such a phenomenon; Cruz's disillusionment with power struggles lacks conviction coming from someone who was at the time a mid-level bureaucrat in a foreign country and who has now written a book that betrays an obsessive delight with power struggles.

The irony is that the U.S. right has jumped on this account as an insider's condemnation of the FSLN, when its only strong moments are in Cruz's P.J. O'Rourke-style debunking of the U.S., from the sandanistas to self-serving GOP politicians, and his portrait of the Contras.

He was more directly involved with Eden Pastora's Southern Front than he ever was with the Sandinistas, making his account of the contras more first-hand and therefore more credible, Cruz's portrait of Pastora as a vainglorious buffoon concerned only with his own heroics is more devastating than any attacks printed in Managua; and Cruz had more respect for Pastora, the "good contra," than for the northern "bad contra," led by a former Somoza National Guardsman. No one on the right comes across as a "freedom fighter." The so-called democratic opposition are simply money-hungry, nothing more. It is unclear at what point Cruz has become infected with this cynicism, in his slide from naivete to nihilism: "My hope was that a channel to the Ortega brothers could be opened

up...and could help ease Managua into a family-oriented dictatorship in the Nicaraguan tradition" (p. 216).

Cruz has tried to hide himself, his thoughts and aspirations, behind the smokescreen of a mediocre historical account, hyped by claims to inside revelations that never materialize. Yet unwittingly he *does* expose himself. In all his many asides about the Nicaraguan character – "conspiracy is the ancient legacy of Nicaraguan political culture," "my enemy today is my friend tomorrow and my enemy the day after, the saying goes," "we believe we are all kings" – Cruz is making a confession. In transferring his own supreme selfishness onto North Americans, Cruz may be wielding a certain ironic justice, but to portray his own nation as being entirely seeped in the Cruz personality is an act of betrayal and dishonesty that renders this book of little value beyond that of vaguely amusing.

Julie Charlip
and Matthew Restall
University of California, Los Angeles

Stephen H. Haber. *Industry and Underdevelopment: The Industrialization, 1890-1940*. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1989. 229 pp.

Stephen Haber's structural economic history of Mexican industrialization in the formative years offers a concise, cogent explanation of Mexico's current industrial underdevelopment. For Haber, the period in which the basic structures of modern Mexican industry were established is the key to understanding contemporary problems, and is a period little studied. There is a "voluminous literature" on Mexican industry since the Second World War; Haber views that period "as essentially an elaboration and consolidation of the process that took place between 1890-1940." Haber's work is a very valuable contribution to the field, a clear, sensible analysis employing sound methods and sources.

Haber introduces the Mexican economic crisis since 1982 on page one, and concludes that "It should have surprised no one that the Mexican 'miracle' fell apart as quickly as it did." The profitable promises of post-war development were shattered by the realities of the "institutions and