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My Car In Managua



Synopsis

Histories of revolutions often focus on military, political, or economic upheavals but sometimes neglect to connect these larger events to the daily lives of "ordinary" people. Yet the peoples' perception that "things are worse than before" can topple revolutionary governments, as shown by the recent defeat of the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua and the governments of Eastern Europe. Providing the kind of prosaic, revealing details that more formal histories have excluded, *My Car in Managua* offers an objective, often humorous description of the great difficulties and occasional pleasures of life in Nicaragua during the Sandinista revolution. During a year's work (1985-1986) at the Instituto Centroamericano de AdministraciÃ³n de Empresas (INCAE), Forrest Colburn purchased a dilapidated car and with it an introduction to everyday life in Nicaragua. His discoveries of the length of time required to register the car (approximately six weeks), the impossibility of finding spare parts (except when U.S. dollars were applied to the search), and the fact that "anyone getting into a car in Managua can be charged a small fee [for car watching] by anyone else" all suggest the difficulties most Nicaraguans faced living in a devastated economy. Drawing on experiences from visits throughout the revolutionary period (1979-1989), Colburn also sheds light on how the Revolution affected social customs and language, gender roles and family relationships, equality and authority, the availability of goods and services, the status of ethnic minorities, and governmental and other institutions. Illustrations by Nicaragua's celebrated political cartoonist RÃfger SÃnchez Flores enliven the lucid text.

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Customer Reviews

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Forrest Colburn teaches politics at Princeton University.

Great book by a great person. You will laugh while you learn about the nation of Nicaragua during the Sandinista Revolution

Amazing book! Once I picked it up I couldn't put it down. Read it in 2 hours. Easy to follow, easy to read, gives a great overview of Nicaraguan Revolutionary days, geography, history, and culture. Forrest Coulburn is simply an Amazing Writer! :)

Bought this book prior to moving to Managua. Made me wonder what I was getting myself into, lol. Very easy book to read and laugh along with. Well worth the purchase.

Once upon a time, as I remember, there was a country called Nicaragua. It was in the news every day. Revolutionaries had taken it over. This was perceived as a great threat to our nation, (the USA)---a well-known military pushover with a decrepit economy which could easily have been totally destroyed by this Central American Marxist powerhouse. We armed the opposition and a war ensued in which the poor killed the poor. Russians, Bulgarians, and even Libyans appeared in Central America. People came visiting from everywhere who dreamed that Latin American countries could develop without being dominated by Uncle Sam. Even Salman Rushdie wrote a book about it. Suddenly, an election was held---hey, I thought Nicaragua was totalitarian---and the revolutionaries lost. Nicaragua faded from the news immediately and nothing more has ever been heard of the place. That's the media biz. *MY CAR IN MANAGUA* stands out like a lighthouse on a dark stormy night. An eminently reasonable man spent a lot of time there and wrote an academic study of the place. This is not it. Colburn captures the flavor of Nicaragua in those tumultuous years here, describing daily life and survival tactics in easily-flowing prose. No cant, no rhetoric, no animosity. In

a brief book he covers a vast variety of subjects; from car purchase and maintenance to accounting and management techniques on "revolutionary" cattle ranches. You can find out what kind of toothpaste was available in Sandinista Nicaragua (Bulgarian) or how to tell a middle class home in Managua (it had cement floors). Everything is described with understanding and with a sense of humor. The book is illustrated with drawings by a famous Nicaraguan cartoonist of the time, Raúl Sánchez Flores, though I did not find them exceptional. We plainly see the economic mess created by a revolution that was far more successful in breaking down old social barriers and empowering the common man. Colburn never harps on this, just notes various unvarnished facts. The affection that the author feels for this impoverished, exhausted country is obvious. For a commonsense view of 1980s Nicaragua that is enjoyable, well-written and insightful, you cannot do better than this book. And it makes you wonder, not for the first time perhaps, if the USA's style of foreign policy will ever change.

Not a bad little book. A quick and entertaining read. These short vignettes on life in Nicaragua give the reader a feel for everyday life in that country after the revolution (it was written in the late 80s) This book does not have discussions of the different Sandinista factions, but rather, what jokes people tell about politicians or how hard it is to get a permit for a car. If one has a passing interest in Central America or Nicaragua specifically, I'd recommend this book.

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