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The Rise and Fall of the Somozo Dynasty

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The corrupt Somoza dynasty which held Nicaragua in a tight grip of power from 1936 to 1979 was a government which was supported economically and politically by the United States. Although Somoza's rule seemed too anti-democratic for the North Americans, it was only the last in a long series of regimes supported by the U.S. In the year 1855, the American William Walker declared himself Nicaraguan President. He ruled for only one year before he was sent into exile. He returned twice to grapple for power but was caught and executed by the Honduran military. Another instance of U.S. intervention occurred in 1912 when the U.S. Marines came to Nicaragua and rallied in support of the Conservative Party, trying to keep it in power. Marines remained in the country from the year 1912 to 1925 and again from 1926 to 1933. Opposition developed, however, and gathered around the anti-imperialist leader Augusto Cesar Sandino (Barry 271-272).

Unable to defeat this small band fighting for national sovereignty, the Marines left the country, but the United States was not content to leave the future of the country in the hands of its citizens. In order to keep a strong pro-American force in Nicaragua, the U.S. instituted what was soon to become the power tool of the Somoza dynasty, the Guardia Nacional (Millet 251). Anastasio Somoza Garcia, the first leader of this national army, won the backing of his men shortly after he had assumed the jefe

(chief) position in 1933 and launched his dictatorship in 1936, a dynasty which would stand for the next forty-three years. With American assistance and the strong arm of the Guardia behind the family, the Somozas soon became one of the richest families in Latin America. After the Sandinistas defeated Anastasio Somoza Debayle, the last dictator and the youngest son of the family, the United States Intelligence Bureau estimated his worth at nine million dollars (Blum, 251). In 1978, the United States finally realized its mistake, but it was too late. The government had helped three dictators to remain in power while they drained the country of its resources, ruined the economic infra-structure, committed gross civil rights violations, and accumulated huge amounts of personal wealth.

Anastasio Somoza García developed a keen interest in politics-- especially North American politics. During the years that the Marines were stationed in Nicaragua, Somoza, who had been educated in the U.S., ingratiated himself with the American officers, impressing them with his "fantastically incorrect and fluent" English (Selser 180). When the U.S. Marines pulled out of the country, Anastasio Somoza García was appointed Jefe Director of the Guardia Nacional, the top position in the military hierarchy. As the leader of the strong military body, Somoza immediately began to gain the loyalty of his troops through graft, promotions, and outright gifts of money. According to Father Miguel D'escoto, an outspoken figure in current Nicaraguan politics, many of the civilians were opposed to the Guardia Nacional and the power of

Somoza. They were afraid of the total control which the North American force held and knew that there would be no way to oust the army if it became corrupt (Yarborough 95-96).

One Nicaraguan in particular came forth opposed to "Yankee intervention" and the oppression of the common worker. His name was Augusto César Sandino. He suffered an American campaign of personal defamation which was unequal to that suffered by any other Latin American leader. He was the illegitimate son of a servant and her employer, born May 18, 1895. Although not neglected by his father, he was raised by his mother from whom he took the name Augusto Calderón. A few years later, he moved in with his father, taking the name Augusto C. Sandino. Soon the C. would be changed to César (Macaulay 49).

In 1921 Sandino engaged in a fight which killed a man and would radically change his life. The reasons for the fight are still unclear, but many speculate between two causes. The fight was either started over an insult given to Sandino's mother or it was a political disagreement (Selser 63). Because of the fight, Sandino was forced to leave the country. He travelled for a few years, first fleeing to Honduras and next to Guatemala. He finally made his home in Tampico, Mexico. While Sandino was living and working in Mexico, he witnessed growing labor problems and the increasing misery of his fellow workers. He saw a need for labor reforms, but American intervention in the country was high, and political reforms could not be completed. This awareness marked the beginning of his anti-imperialist career, a campaign waged

mainly against North American intervention (Selser 64-65).

In May 1926, Sandino, after becoming thoroughly involved in nationalist politics, was summoned home by his father. Upon his arrival, he was enraged by the Marine intervention in his country; in 1927, he formed a small band of peasants which began fighting for nationalism (Macaulay 54). These guerrilla peasants became known as Sandinistas and were primarily interested in a slow, methodical spread of the revolution, securing one spot before moving to another (Macaulay 10). Although these men were not at first successful, their methodical attacks lasted for six years with a surprising success rate. Nicaraguan public opinion was gathering behind the nationalist hero Sandino.

The current President of Nicaragua, Juan Bautista Sacasa, was scared of the growing nationalist sentiment and started to suppress the Sandinista movements. One morning in January 1933, Sandino reported that he awoke with a bad feeling. He was afraid that if peace were not reached with the Sacasa government, he would die. Sacasa was very pleased to hear of the possibility of a peace settlement, arranging terms on February 2, 1933, for Sandino to consider. Pleased by the January 2nd, American withdrawl of troops, Sandino agreed to sign the treaty and end the destructive guerrilla warfare which had been waged in order to rid the country of the American Marines (Macaulay 245-246). Sacasa, willing to pursue further negotiations, called Sandino into the city of Managua for a banquet and open talks with the Sandinista leaders. The banquet progressed well but, later that same evening, tragedy

struck. Augusto César Sandino, along with two of his rebel leaders, was assassinated. His brother, Sócrates, was murdered in a field outside of town that same night. The assassination was successful because it killed both the leader and the strong Sandinista movement that had gained such strong public force (Macaulay 256).

Somoza, the leader of the Guardia Nacional, publicly denied any link to the assassination; however, he began spreading rumors through the Guardia and through his press organ, La Prensa, that he was responsible for the murder and that the order had come directly from Washington. Actually, the order to execute Sandino was not directly from Washington, although American Ambassador Lane had told Somoza that the elimination of Sandino was supported and recommended by the U.S. because they considered him a disturbance to the peace. Somoza, convinced of U.S. support, then signed with some of his generals a pact entitled "The Death of César." This pact insured that none of the men would be tempted to confess, making them all accomplices to the murder of Sandino. Sacasa was enraged. He feared that his administration would be blamed for a crime which it had not committed. Three months after Sandino's murder, Somoza openly provoked President Sacasa by admitting to the murder of Sandino. Making the situation even worse, he commended everyone who had been involved with the assassination and asked the National Congress to grant them all amnesty for the crime. Congress acceded to his wishes, Sacasa vetoed the act, and Congress once again showed the growing power of Somoza by overruling the

presidential veto (Crawley 87-88).

Sacasa's power was now dwindling, but he suspected that the United States was supporting Somoza and did nothing to stop the man who opposed him. Although he was nonchalant, his wife Maria was acting in quite a different way. For many years she had been watching Somoza gain power and saw him as a real threat to her husband's presidency. In an attempt to stop Somoza's quest for power, she went to Washington for assistance. She was unsuccessful, being told that because of Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy, the U.S. could not intervene (Crawley 91). When Sacasa made feeble cries of foul play in the Nicaraguan government, he was advised to swallow "la pildora del Somocismo" and resign from the presidency (Sacasa 347). In 1936, Maria was ultimately defeated when General Anastasio Somoza García ousted Juan Batista Sacasa from the presidency. Sacasa did step down but on May 31, he pleaded with Somoza not to resort to bloodshed to solve the country's political problems (Sacasa 351). The United States quickly recognized the new government, pleased with the potential of having Somoza as a supporting force in Latin American. This forced takeover marked the beginning of the longest dynasty ever to rule in Latin America.

In order to remain the strongest man in the country, Somoza retained his position as Jefe over the Guardia Nacional. His soldiers were kept away from the general public in order to keep them loyal. They enjoyed a special government subsidy for food and clothing and were not subject to the same duties and taxes as

the civilians. They also were rarely tried in civil courts for crimes committed against citizens. These men in the Guardia prospered under Somoza's rule while the average Nicaraguan suffered (Millet 253).

In office, Somoza García immediately began to strengthen his country's position and to increase his personal wealth by welcoming U.S. investment and making himself into a staunch U.S. ally. He denounced Communism and retained strong diplomatic ties with the United States, which allowed Nicaragua to be used as a stabilizing front against Communist influence in Central America (Curtis 138). Once the ally was gained, American funding for all programs increased, and Somoza showed himself to be a shrewd businessman by using the funds in his best interest (Etchison 40-41). He took over valuable lands by persuading occupants to sell them at half price or merely donate them to the government. After these lands had been acquired, he used government funding to build roads and lay telegraph and telephone lines throughout the country. These new lines of communication opened up his land and nearly doubled the worth of his property. Soon Somoza owned the nation's shipping lines, the national airline, textile factories, sugar mills, and about one-fourth of the country's arable lands (Crawley 142). In addition to his land holdings, Somoza's personal bank account grew rapidly. The Nicaraguan public generally had to bear the brunt of his growing fortune. An example of his greed involved his beef export tax. He charged 1.5 cents per pound on everyone else's exported beef, money that went directly toward his herd (Crawley

97). Although Somoza bragged that the country had more millionaires than ever and that the people should love him, Nicaraguan hatred for him grew daily (Christian 24).

After his term as President had expired, Somoza decided it would be easier to bypass the partisan effort in the upcoming election. With his loyal body of soldiers supporting him, he merely had himself appointed to the presidency to serve another term (Crawley 98).

After a mild show of reservation, the United States once again decided that it would be beneficial to have a strong pro-American force in Central America. Somoza was even invited to the White House to meet with Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1940. When Roosevelt was asked about inviting a dictator into the White House for a meeting, he replied, "He's a son-of-a-bitch, but he's ours." (Christian 24). During this time period, Somoza encouraged Washington to grant him a two-million-dollar loan to build a coast-to-coast road from the Pacific to the Caribbean. This new road opened up many lands which were owned mostly by him and allowed another increase in his personal wealth.

By 1941, Somoza was still searching for ways to gain international approval and therefore more international funds. In an attempt to gain this support, he made what was to be his wisest decision since he had been in power. Somoza declared his support for the allied powers fighting in World War II. This decision did not cause him to enter his men in any actual combat but greatly enhanced U.S. military funding (Crawley 100). To show his

sincerity in backing the allies, Somoza seized German and Italian properties and sold them, with some of the money going to government coffers while most went directly to the Somoza family. Although riots and violence broke out among the German and Italian landowners during this seizure of land, the National Guard, as always, acted swiftly and effectively to halt disorder (Ryan 176). Using the land available to them, the United States constructed large airfields at Managua and Puerto Cabezas and a naval base at the port of Corinto. The American soldiers who were brought into the country to man these stations stimulated the economy but also caused a massive surge of inflation. The poor of the country were driven way below the poverty level as a result of the greediness of Anastasio Somoza García (Christian 22).

By 1944, Somoza knew that he wanted to remain President of Nicaragua but could not run in the next election because of a constitutional ban. In a masterful show of tactical politics, he began an elaborate plan. First he had his congressmen pass an illegal constitutional ammendment, lifting his ban on re-election. He then vetoed this bill in a show of political justice. His next step was to officially organize labor unions, blocking the opposition of their cries for reform and also keeping the labor movement under his wing. After this delicate web was in place, Somoza announced that he would once again run for re-election. The United States was appalled that he would expect to rule the country for another term and warned him that if he did not withdraw from the race, all of his support would be rescinded (Crawley 105).

Somoza did not immediately take his name from the ballot, but when internal uprisings also started to plague his administration, he began to search for a way to remain in control yet keep all of his support. By 1945, he was convinced that the United States support was not within his grasp. With an ulterior motive, he signed a pledge that he would publicly disavow his candidacy and also release all political prisoners (Crawley 104). The United States was satisfied, and Somoza was now able to avert his attention to his second plan--backing a puppet for President who would allow him to keep control of the country. The man Somoza chose to back as President was the aging politician Leonardo Arguello. Somoza decided to keep control of the power tool, the Guardia, but allow Arguello, who he felt would be a sycophant, to assume the position of President (Crawley 102-104).

On May 1, 1947, the election took place. The voters were lined up at the polls in two separate lines. The first line was only constituents who would cast their vote for Arguello, while the second line supported the opposition. Arguello's line progressed smoothly all day long, while the opposition's lines ran into many difficulties. Their line was kept from moving by problems such as improper identification and many mechanical problems. By the end of the day, the opposition's line still barely moving, was disseminated because the polls had closed at the hour the election was to be completed. In this questionable election, Arguello had taken control of the presidency (Crawley 106-107). Somoza had kept his power and U.S. support.

Although Tacho Somoza felt that he was in total control, the situation soon changed. Arguello did not continue to be the malleable pawn which he was originally perceived to be. He tried at first to change the command in the Guardia, sending ardent Somoza supporters to outlying posts in an attempt to weaken the loyalty of the army. He next announced his appointees for cabinet, and they included eight of Somoza's opposition. Finally he enraged Somoza by countermanding many of his orders-- an unheard of offense (Diederich 27-29). After Arguello had gained some support, he issued orders for Somoza to leave the country. Although he had no intention of leaving, on May 23, 1947, Somoza made public a plan which said that he would leave the country (Diederich 29). Very quickly, Somoza arranged a military takeover and had Arguello declared mentally incompetent. First Arguello only was imprisoned in a basement chamber of the President's house, but soon he, like Sacasa, was sent into exile in Mexico (Crawley 108).

A designate was quickly appointed to the presidency. This politician immediately showed that he was not strong enough and another was appointed. This second man was Victor Roman y Reyes who ironically was the uncle of Anastasio Somoza Garcia. Since the leader of the country had been changed three times within a few weeks, the opposition (anti-Somoza liberals) saw a split in the party and planned a revolt. Somoza met and crushed this attack with the Guardia Nacional. This military victory further strengthened the political position of Somoza Garcia and convinced him that he should run against his incumbent uncle for President

during the next election. This campaign never had to be run because before the next election date, Victor Roman y Reyes died of a heart attack. Somoza was appointed to Roman y Reyes' position for the remaining three weeks. At the next election, more fraudulent practices were utilized, and Somoza won the presidency by a comfortable amount (Crawley 107-108).

Although Somoza held a tight grip over Nicaraguan politics, he was a leader who was not known for his wide-scale brutality but instead for his selective cruelty. Unlike most other oppressive dictators, he would capture only the leaders of his opposition. The leaders would then be tortured for many weeks but would usually be released from prison in about two years (Christian 24). One of the favorite torture methods used by Somoza and his men was dubbed la maquinita, or the little machine. This device was used to persuade prisoners into leaking information. It consisted of a small electric wire which was wrapped around a prisoner's scrotum; then if a compromise was not reached, the voltage was released. When Somoza was asked about the device by a reporter, he merely replied that he knew it didn't hurt because he had tried the machine on his hand once (Diederich 35). Although cruelty was used during Somoza's reign, the torture was limited to very small numbers of people. The reason that the repression was not more widespread was due in part to the fact that the Guardia was always present in the villages, constantly watching the people; therefore, the opposition parties remained small, and Somoza was left to concentrate almost solely on his personal wealth. By 1950, the

Somoza family was the largest land holder in Nicaragua (Barry 272).

In 1953, a new organization could be seen working in Nicaragua-- the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States. Jose Figueres, The Costa Rican President, accused Somoza of backing the C.I.A. in its attempt to remove him from office (Christian 21). Later that same year, to once again show his support for the U.S., Somoza let the CIA use his country as an airstrip and training post for the U.S. government's battle against Communism in Guatemala. These two operations were the first two blatant maneuvers to be undertaken in Latin America by the C.I.A.-- an organization which would later play a large role in Nicaraguan politics (Blum 81,91).

In a final show of alliance to the United States, Anastasio Somoza García signed the treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation, and Protocol between Nicaragua and the United States. This treaty was signed June 21,1956, and made public to the other Latin American countries as well as to the rest of the world that Nicaragua would support the intentions of the United States. (Ryan 188). Once again Somoza had made an intelligent decision. He had appeased the United States by showing his support but did not have to make a sacrifice in doing so.

By fall of 1956, Somoza's luck ran out. Public sentiment

conspiring against Somoza, Lopez revealed through a letter to his mother that the assassination had been a lone act of desperation against a despised man for the sake of his country. Lopez also stated that he knew he would lose his life in the attempt, but to remove Somoza would be worth the price (Crawley 116-117).

Lopez's assassination attempt did not prove to be as successful as he had hoped. Although Somoza Garcia had been killed, the Somoza family remained in power for another twenty-two years. Somoza had three sons, one of whom was illegitimate. The illegitimate son was placed in the Guardia and was quickly elevated to a position of status. The other two sons were sent to North America in order to gain an education that would help them to lead the country after their father's demise. The oldest son, Luis Somoza Debayle, was groomed to be the President while his younger brother, Tachito, was sent to West Point Military Academy so that he could gain control of the Guardia Nacional (Christian 25).

After the death of Tacho Somoza, Somoza's sons used the excuse of punishing their father's murderers as a way to consolidate power. A wide scale crackdown was issued as members of opposition parties were harassed by the Guardia. Soon the nation calmed as the two sons assumed the positions in government for which they had been trained. Luis began to serve as President while his brother assumed the Jefe position over the Guardia. As Luis's presidency began, he proved to be a more peaceful leader than his father had been. He was excellent with people, and as a political

spokesperson, he easily manipulated Congress. An agricultural major in college, he had not had the strong military training that his brother had and spoke much less frankly (Diederich 55).

In an attempt to bring peace to the dissatisfied people, Luis drafted an ammendment for constitutional approval stating that neither he nor his brothers would run for President in the next Nicaraguan election. In fact, it stipulated that anyone related to him by blood up to the "fourth degree" could not succeed him. This ammendment was an attempt to quiet the growing opposition to the Somoza name. Luis still had every intention of the family retaining its powerful hand in the country, but he felt that it would be safer to maintain the power if they didn't continue to hold the presidency (Diederich 55-56). Even though the new ammendment was a popular idea in Nicaragua, Luis still had major political problems. The plight of the lower classes was worsening. Because the cotton and the livestock industries boomed, the large haciendas grew even larger, pushing the subsistence farmers off their land. These peasants were usually forced to work on the hacienda for very meager wages (Crawley 121). Luis saw this growing disparity among the peasants and knew that he needed support to strengthen his regime in order to quell any uprisings. Once again, Nicaragua turned toward the United States for support. Luis announced that Nicaragua would become a "bridge of democracy." Moderate reform laws were passed, the constitutional ban on re-election was instated, and a few political prisoners were released. The United States once again began to look favorably on Nicaragua

and her new attempts at reforms (Crawley 125).

While Luis was trying to bring peace to the country, his brother was fighting him and trying to overshadow his power. After 1960, Luis suspended civil liberties and dealt harshly with all opposition. Many claim that this sudden political change was made because of pressure imposed on him by Tachito. Cuban Communism had become a threatening problem for the U.S., and Tachito felt that in order to maintain United States support, Communism must be fought against openly (Barry 36). He advocated a strong hold to the presidency in his country, the opposite of Luis's ideology. Luis continued making decisions with Tachito, the harsher and the stronger of the two, always over his shoulder trying to influence him.

After serving a term in office, Luis followed the constitutional amendment that his father had originated and then he passed it through office; he did not run for re-election. In his place the family chose a man who they felt would act as a "puppet." His name was René Schick, but after he gained the office of President in 1963, he was not the faithful pawn that he had been for years as Tacho's legal secretary and Luis's advisor. During his time as President, he released detainees, gave freedom to the press, and the forced the Guardia to reduce imprisonment of detainee's dropped substantially (Diederich 130). After several showdowns with Schick, Tachito let the public know that in 1967, he would take power. He began taking this power by grooming loyal forces (131). Although Schick caused a problem for Tachito and his

family, the problem was short lived. Schick soon died. Immediately, Tachito arranged an election in which he employed his Guardia to watch over the voting stations. In this fraudulent election Tachito gained seventy percent of the vote and realized his dream of becoming Nicaragua's President, but in the process, he had his first of several showdowns with the opposition politician Fernando Aguero (Crawley 20).

Meanwhile, as Somoza Debayle was courting the United States, knowing that the friendship would secure his power over the people, Fernando Aguero was rallying the people. During the 1963 election, he had asked that the Organization of American States supervise the voting, but Somoza with his Guardia Nacional would not allow it. Somoza publicly denounced this attempted vigilant act as an insult to the country's national sovereignty (Etchison 36). Enraged, the Traditional Conservatives and Independent Liberals boycotted the election; the consequence was that the remaining voters and those who were related to the Guardia insured Schick's overwhelming victory.

Undaunted by his failed attempt in 1963, Aguero tried again in 1967 to have Nicaraguan elections supervised. He asked only that the Organization of American States insure that the voting processes were fair and that the Guardia was kept away from the actual polling stations. His request was denied, but this time the reasoning differed. The O.A.S. responded that if the U.S. permitted the supervision of the elections, the request would be granted. Aguero, elated, petitioned the U.S. to ask its allowance

for the measure, but he was disappointed with the reply; the government had already given its support to Tachito Somoza and saw no need for the O.A.S. to stand guard over the elective process (Etchison 37). Somoza was elected.

Growing up in Nicaragua, Tachito was an intelligent boy. At the age of ten, he was sent to the United States, where he would spend the next ten years of his life trying to gain an education superior to the one offered in his country. He was often harassed and ridiculed during his school days because of his Latin roots but this ridicule ceased when Tachito's father came to the United States to meet with Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He finished his education at West Point and was given the Guardia upon his graduation. Many teased that Somoza was the first student from West Point to receive an army upon his graduation (Diederich 83).

As Tachito Somoza Debayle took over the reins of his country in February of 1967, he ruled in a way that was very similar to the way his father ruled. At first he stepped back into his position as jefe supremo of the National Guard. He soon tried to make the people believe that there was an equal distribution of wealth in the country, while in reality, he was trying to expand his own financial holdings and allow as many relatives as possible to hold government positions (Millet 232). Only a few days after he had entered the office of President, Tachito showed his strong will by closing down the opposition radio station, claiming that it was a Communist threat (Crawley 141). On April 8th, 1967, unhappy with his brother's recent rise to President, Luis had a

massive coronary. He was treated by the best doctors, but died five days later. Tacho was not only now free from his brother's more moderate opinions, but also became the major inheritor of his father's huge estate (Diederich 83). After the first few months, an opposing force, the Frente Sandinista Liberacion Nacional, began to give Tacho more and more problems, but he repeatedly reported that the Communists had been crushed (67).

This same year, the faction which would continue to haunt Somoza until his downfall emerged--the Frente Sandinista Liberacion Nacional. August 1967, at the mountain peak of Pancasan, a small group of revolutionaries who had taken their name from the former nationalist hero, Sandino, reappeared. They faught and were defeated. Silvio Mayorga, a leader of the group, was killed in combat (Booth 140). While Tachito was jubilant about this defeat, the Sandinistas (FSLN) were just beginning their long build-up to a victory, and by the end of 1967, they numbered approximately fifty men and women who were willing to die for the revolution (Diederich 84-85).

The ploy of labeling the opposition's movement as a Communist threat became a tactic that Somoza would employ many more times in the future. He knew that if he posed as one man battling the Communist world that the United States, as well as other capitalistic nations, would support him through donations of arms and possibly gifts of money. Somoza was correct in this assumption, partly because he knew that the proximity of his country to the Panama Canal made the area particularly susceptible

to the Communist threat. The United States was terrified that Russia would recognize the importance of the East-West link to the Pacific and try to take Nicaragua as a first step in securing the canal (Sulzberger 192).

Somoza was no doubt an excellent politician and used his power as President of Nicaragua to gain financial allies. An excellent example of his political scheming was his attempt to gain even more funding from North America than his father had received. In previous years Somoza had been known to intervene in United States electoral races in hopes of assisting sympathetic politicians who would someday hold power. In the election of 1968 this tactic proved a goldmine for Tachito Somoza. He contributed to Richard Nixon's campaign through a mutual friend , Bebe Rebozo. When Nixon was elected President, Somoza's hopes soared (Crawley 146); the new President was giving a lot of attention to Latin America, although most of the attention was unfavorable, but Somoza Debayle saw in Nixon a chance to gain more U.S. support (Sulzberger 96).

Somoza's aid to the Presidential campaign did ultimately prove fruitful as Nixon offered the hand of foreign aid to the poverty-stricken land of Nicaragua. Although this gesture seemed very humanitarian, Nixon had ulterior motives. His plan for the country was to use the land as an American stronghold in order to keep hostile movements, such Fidel Castro's Communist movement and the threat of other insurgency, away from the American continent (Sulzberger 73). In the Nicaraguan-American alliance, it seemed that no one had any concern that the natives were crying out for

national sovereignty while trying to escape from under the hands of their oppressive dictator. Making the situation even worse, the new American Ambassador, Turner B. Shelton, was an ardent Somoza fan and would frequently avoid portraying the true Nicaraguan situation to Washington. President Nixon and U.S. Ambassador Shelton worked together to strengthen Nicaragua and help keep Somoza in power against the will of the native citizens (Millet 235). Historians will argue that supporting Somoza while ignoring the citizens of the country created even more support among the people for the left wing parties, which would ultimately take control of the country ("Nicaragua: Guns for Somoza" 255).

The years following the election were not peaceful years in Nicaragua. By the end of the 1960's, public outcry had risen against the regime to such a pitch that Somoza could no longer avoid the cries of his citizenry. With his shrewd political calculations, he seized upon the reform elements which had been advocated by the opposition but enacted them to a lesser degree than had originally been proposed. This action temporarily served not only to appease the public but also to fragment his opposition, bringing the faction of the opposition that was happy with the maneuvers back to the Partido Liberacion Nacional,(PLN), Somoza's party (Ryan 177).

In 1969, the Frente once again rose up against Somoza. They attacked banks and comercial enterprises in attempts to raise money to buy arms. Trying to stop these robberies, Somoza ordered a small attack which killed five and captured two of the guerrillas.

Tachito once again announced that he had wiped out the Communists, but part of the group merely escaped by fleeing in exile to Costa Rica (Diederich 87-88). In 1970, another attack was launched by the Sandinistas. This campaign was labeled the Zinica campaign and was ultimately successful because it was the first attack to win the sympathy and support of the civilians (Booth 40).

It soon became obvious that the reforms had been too little, too late. Nicaraguans were still furious with Somoza's wealth in the face of a toppling economy. Somoza Debayle was forced to take a step which was larger than he had originally intended. First, he offered Aguero, his former enemy, more representation in government. He offered to give his party three of the seven seats on the Supreme Court, one seat on each of the courts of appeal, two repesentatives on the board of each autonomous government agency, an advisor in each Ministry, the Directorate of Planning, the Attorney General's office and other positions. Then, in early 1972, Tachito handed over his power as President to a new triumvirate: Aguero, Robert Martinez-Lacayo, and Alfonso Lopez Cordero. The last two represented the power of the PLN, while Aguero held the power of Somoza's opposition. Turner B. Shelton, The United States Ambassador to Nicaragua, was very pleased with the changes and arranged for Somoza to be invited to the White House for a visit with Nixon. Although this relinquishment of power impressed many, including natives, the core of the opposition felt that they had been betrayed by Aguero. The election, regardless of the number of votes cast, would place sixty of the

one hundred seats in Congress in the hands of Somoza's party, the liberal nationalists (Crawley 146). They knew that without a majority in power, it would be very difficult to make the changes in government that they wished and impossible to remove Somoza from power. The arrangement of the triumvirate, therefore, was a compromise which appeased neither party but would not stand for more than a year.

December 23, 1972, disaster struck Nicaragua. A series of earthquakes virtually destroyed the capital city of Managua, killing thousands of people. Anarchy dominated the country and the newly formed triumvirate was not yet strong enough to maintain its powers. The Guardia Nacional virtually disintegrated. Along with most of the people of Managua, the Guardsmen went into a panic. For most of them, finding their families became an immediate priority. Some were also seen in the streets looting the stores (Diederich 94). U.S. Ambassador Shelton tried to convince Somoza that a seizure of political power was necessary in order to bring a semblance of democracy back into the country ("A Secret War for Nicaragua" 42-43). Somoza, assured of United States support, forced himself back into power. Acting as Jefe to the Guardia Nacional, Somoza formed a reconstruction agency to help rebuild Managua. Next, he granted unlimited power to the head of the bureau so that the triumvirate could not politically block any move which was made by the head of the organization. By 1974, Somoza had appointed himself to the head position of the new reconstruction agency, and using his omnipotent powers, declared

himself a presidential candidate. He was re-elected, and the reins of the country were again in the hands of a member of the Somoza dynasty (Etchison 39).

As Nicaragua was trying to rebuild its devastated capital city, she received help from many different countries. The most charitable of these countries was the United States, sending over twenty-seven million dollars in aid (Etchison 39). Although this amount seemed as if it would be very beneficial, much of the money did not reach the victims. Somoza used large amounts of the aid to rebuild his own businesses destroyed by the quake, adding to the amount of his fortune. He also paid large sums of money to the officers and the soldiers in the Guardia Nacional in order to keep the force loyal to himself. Critics of U.S. aid to Nicaragua seized upon this incident, claiming that the money not only bolstered Somoza's right wing dictatorship but also fed money into programs which were so badly managed that the aid fell right back into the hands of the dictator, hurting the victims more than it ever helped. (Curtis 137). Regardless of criticism, the power was back in the hands of Somoza as he continued to lead his country with the same money- grabbing style as he had in the past.

The year 1973 was basically eventless because the country was still shocked by the quake, but 1974 brought with it many problems. The dissension began when a party was thrown in honor of American ambassador Shelton. An attempted coup by the growing Sandinista faction was launched during the party to show growing disapproval of U.S. intervention. Due to a discrepancy of time, the group was

not successful with their goal of catching Somoza and Ambassador Shelton in the house, but they did find a number of family members. In exchange for these family members, the Sandinistas demanded that political prisoners be released, a revolutionary broadcast be made to the people, a large ransom given to the perpetrators and safe release guaranteed. All demands were not (Diederich 92).

The coup enraged Somoza. He was jilted out of his complacency and warned of impending doom. Instantly, he instituted the first serious wave of country-wide repression against the left wing forces. This reign of terror included press censorship, military tribunals trying civilians without fair representation, and incidents such as the mass slaughter of 109 civilians who were found bullet ridden in three mass graves. The Guardia was roaming through the city streets terrorizing the people (Crawley 152). The warfare was also conducted in the countryside and small villages. Peasants who were suspected subversives were dragged out of their homes and openly shot as examples for others who might think of joining the left-wing party (Walker 57-61). Church sources reported 400 deaths after the December 27th coup, but Amnesty International statistics were much higher (Crawley 152). As the people were warring against their government, Tachito and Managua's archbishop, Obando y Bravo, were also having disagreements, and a new split occurred between the government and the Catholic Church (Millet 236). The church, adopting the new ideas of liberation theology, began to sever its ties with the Nicaraguan strongman who was persecuting his own people. Throughout this entire period

of terror and censorship, although there were many witnesses, there was an absence of official records. Most of the court martialling by military tribunals was not recorded, and none of the brutality and cruelty toward the peasants or campesinos by the Guardia was documented (Walker 100).

Opposition to Somoza's tyrannical rule was growing decisively. One of the most threatening groups of the opposition was the FSLN. The faction had been started by three men: Carlos Fonseca Amador, Silvio Mayorga, and Tomas Borge. They named the group the Frente Sandinista Liberacion Nacional, robbed a few banks to start their treasury, and disappeared into the safety of Honduras to train. In 1961, 1963, and 1967, the guerrillas ventured out of Honduras but were crushed by the National Guard every time that they appeared. Still, they pledged to continue to build their forces and attack until they had brought down Somoza (Booth 138-139). After several years of little organization, in 1970 the Sandinistas made a change. Their forces grew larger and better supported by the peasants in the area. The National Guard tried to counter this growing support by repression of people in the areas which were suspected to be loyal to the Sandinistas. These hard tactics backfired, causing hatred of the Guardia among the civilians (Booth 141).

By 1975, the Sandinistas were so numerous that the party was able to withstand a split into three factions: Terceristas--a group emphasizing rural and urban insurrection, Proletarios--the faction which urged the use of propaganda in factories and poor

neighborhoods, and the adherents of the prolonged people's war (GPP)--the men who wanted to continue a slow methodical build up of the war. Although these three factions were very diverse, encompassing both a democratic faction and a Marxist faction, the party would later unify in order to fight Somoza, the common enemy (Gleijesis 127-128).

During these years of repression, tangible and intangible tokens of U.S. support continued until it incensed the population most affected by Somoza's dictatorship, the lower and even middle classes. The growing left wing felt that all their attempts to topple the long-standing dictatorship were futile because of the strong American hand supporting Somoza's regime (Kirkpatrick 34). For example, in 1976 the U.S. State Department approved a sale of arms to Somoza ("Nicaragua: Guns for Somoza" 255). The Nicaraguan people realized that these guns would be used against them by the Guardia to suppress their voices against Somoza. A change in American foreign policy was absolutely necessary if the public was to accept continued American intervention in the country of Nicaragua.

A change, though very small, was just what Nicaragua saw in 1976. As the United States President, Jimmy Carter, took office, foreign policy slowly began to change. In place of earlier American foreign policies of containment, Carter's central concern was that of modernization for the third world countries (Kirkpatrick 39). He felt that labor unions could help the workers of the country to rise from their own poverty. The Carter

administration did utilize the C.I.A.in Nicaragua, but these agents were employed to support the democratic structure in Nicaragua by organizing and rallying labor unions ("A Secret War for Nicaragua" 44). The Carter administration also had a belief that the toppling of the Somoza autocracy was inevitable, desirable, and in the American interest. For this reason, Carter did not fear the left movement or label it as a Communist threat that needed to be crushed. He saw it as a rational step in the civilian movement toward toppling a dictator.

Although Carter was not alarmed by the Sandinista movement, American public opinion and congressional sentiment were still against the group, fearing Communist roots and trying to avoid another "Cuba." As late as June 23, 1977, the U.S. House approved a foreign assistance appropriation bill that authorized 3.1 million dollars in military assistance to the Nicaraguan government. The American public was naive about the human rights violations which Carter had targeted and was trying to purge from the country ("Nicaragua: Guns for Somoza" 255).

On January 10, 1978, a catalyst for public opinion occurred. A leading member of the opposition, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, was ambushed and shot by a gang of hired killers. Tachito immediately claimed that he was not involved with the assassination and hunted down and prosecuted the killers. They confessed instantly but were very vague about who had paid them to commit the crime. Suspicion of Somoza's involvement was widespread (Crawley 163). The assassination of the public figure Chamorro was the final act.

Because he had been shot him in the street where everyone could see, the public outcry was overwhelming. The majority of the population of Nicaragua would now back any movement to remove who they thought was a cold-blooded murderer from office.

A change in United States public sentiment did not occur until June 20, 1978. The American people were incensed when the Guardia Nacional, during one of its regular raids, killed an American television newsman (Historic Documents of 1979 581). The ABC reporter, Bill Stewart, had been on the scene in Managua filming with a group of other newsmen. When he saw a battle on the streets, he approached with his press card held high. Upon encountering a guardsman, he was ordered to his knees, told to lie down on the ground, put his hands behind his head, and was shot. The rest of the crew had filmed the incident, and they barely escaped with their evidence and their lives (Deiderich 271). Finally, the United States government had decided to watch Somoza more closely but was not ready to give up total control of the country. Congress decided to try to support the Guardia in hopes that a competent leader might emerge that would continue to favor the United States (Walker 58). The C.I.A. also helped by searching for a more moderate leader among the labor unions with which they were involved (Blum 331). Together, Congress and the C.I.A. sought for Somoza an alternative who was not deeply involved with the Sandinista regime--a believed Marxist contingent.

This continued covert action by the C.I.A. frightened Somoza, causing him to further tighten his strings on the media (Van

Pulley 208). The repression across the countryside became even harsher as the Sandinistas grew in number. Estimates of the students against the government were striking. The opposition paper La Prensa estimated 70% Marxist and 25% social cristianos with the remaining 5% indifferent (Crawley 150). Ironically, in 1978, in the midst of public dissension, when political prisoners were being tortured and killed, Jimmy Carter thought that Somoza was trying to improve his horrendous record of human rights violations. He wrote a letter congratulating him on his strides toward correcting the problems in his country (Crawley 163). This letter was Somoza's last bestowal of political approval by the U.S., for the dynasty was coming into a time of great danger, facing insurmountable odds.

On August 22, 1978, the revolution began. Twenty-five Sandinists struck in Managua and marched unopposed into the Palacio Nacional, the seat of Congress, and a number of government agencies, taking fifteen hundred hostages. This attack was led by Eden Pastora, who was referred to as commandante Cero. He was the only guerrilla involved in the attack who had ever been inside the Palacio Nacional, and that was only as a child (Diederich 179). The Sandinistas inside the building asked for Arch-bishop Obando y Bravo and two other bishops to negotiate with them. The ambassadors of Costa Rica also served as mediators (180). After the situation calmed, they demanded a release of fifty-nine political prisoners, a ransom of ten million dollars, the broadcast of a revolutionary communiqué, and a safe departure from the

country. The Sandinistas received all of their demands except the complete amount of the ransom (Crawley 163).

This small group of Sandinistas had been hiding in the mountains, training, growing, and propagandizing since 1961. Renewed nationalistic sentiment was beginning to enhance the public opinion of the Sandinistas. For the remainder of 1978, small guerilla attacks were repeatedly made on the countryside. The earlier philosophy of a slow, methodic revolution carried out in isolated villages was still prevalent.

On December 20, 1978, Cyrus R. Vance called an emergency meeting in Washington of the Organization of American States to consider five resolutions: the Nicaraguan people must bring their own peace; the Somoza regime must be removed; a democratic government must be installed; a guarantee of rights for all Nicaraguans must be ensured; and free elections must take place in order to elect the next leader of the country. (Historic Documents of 1979 582). Although some of the Latin American countries were not in favor of the proposals, they nonetheless passed and were presented to Somoza for his acceptance. In early 1979, when Somoza did not agree to the O.A.S. recommendations, the Carter administration made the first in a series of steps to distance itself from a regime the U.S. had supported for almost forty-two years (American Foreign Policy Basic Documents 1977-1980 1317).

During the first three months of 1979, the Sandinistas continued their infrequent guerilla actions (Christian 92-93). Hundreds of bombs were set off in the cities, while advances

continued on more rural areas. On April 7, 1979, a full scale offensive was launched. Between two hundred and three hundred rebel soldiers descended from the mountains, claiming control of the city of Esteli (Christian 93). When the Guardia was summoned to the city, the rebels retreated, slipping untouched through the Guardia lines. Somoza's army was now forced to retake the city because of the resistance which had remained, causing a loud public outcry against Somoza and his men.

Other Latin American nations, by this time, were ardently supporting the Sandinistas, and although none of their actions were decisive, their policies combined to weaken the Somozan regime and help insurgents. Some aid came from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Hondoras to help Somoza. Other supporters of Nicaragua included Portugal, Israel, and Spain, who sent weapons to Somoza up until his final two weeks in office, but on the whole, foreign intervention proved much more detrimental to Somoza than helpful (Booth 129).

Costa Rica, bitter from her continuing schisms with Nicaragua, became a supporter of the FSLN. They gave the guerrillas sanctuary and bases within their country. By 1978 and 1979, the Costa Rican government allowed the FSLN to campaign openly in the streets, stringing propaganda throughout the country. When Somoza finally fell in 1979, Costa Rica immediately offered recognition to the new government (Booth 131). Other governments in favor of the Sandinistas included Cuba, Venezuela, Panama, and Mexico. This strong band of groups supporting the Sandinistas placed an

incredible burden on the Somoza regime (Booth 134).

Although the Sandinistas were victorious in the north, the Guardia was still winning battles in the south. Undaunted by April's northern failure, in June of 1979, the organization remained loyal and at its maximum enrollment of ten thousand men. The Guardia maintained this level of loyalty until Somoza resigned his position as President, but virtually all other sectors of society were opposed to Somoza and backed the opposition groups (Christian 104).

Cutting American ties with the Somoza dynasty began with a reduction of arms shipments which the U.S. had previously appropriated, and later, with a termination of the entire military assistance program; however, Somoza merely purchased black-market weapons from Israel, South Africa, and the Bahamas (Christian 91). Next, the American Embassy government officials were reduced, and the funding for humanitarian organizations was stopped: the Peace Corps was ordered to leave, and the Agency for International Development was not allowed additional funding to begin new programs (American Foreign Policy and Basic Documents 1317).

The United States finally realized that the dynasty she had supported for so many years was corrupt. Now America desperately sought in the Guardia a replacement for Somoza who would also prove beneficial to the interests of the U.S. (United States Department of State 4). This successor was never found. Since Somoza was terribly afraid of strong leaders, paranoid that they would take his power, Crawley feels that no competent successor was able to

emerge from Somoza's Guardia (168). In June of 1979, in a last effort to keep the Sandinistas from taking power, the United States suggested a government of reconciliation, combining all "democratic sectors" including the PLN and the National Guard but excluding the FSLN. The Sandinistas responded with an immediate rejection to the proposal (Booth 177-178).

The rebel-backed Sandinistas took power over Nicaragua on July 19, 1979. At this time, the Red Cross estimated a loss of ten thousand lives between September 1978 and July 1979. With Nicaragua in such an utter state of turmoil, the U.S. decided to facilitate the government's transition. She offered to receive Somoza and allow him the protection of U.S. law (American Foreign Policy and Basic Documents 1320). Somoza reluctantly decided that leaving the country would be in his best interest, and on July 13th, he left Managua unannounced, resigning his presidency (Christian 110). Somoza had realized his prophecy, "If I have to go, I'll go over a mountain of bloody corpses" (Selser 205). Directly prior to fleeing the country, he ruined the economic infrastructure (Walker 59), plundering the National Bank and leaving less than four million dollars in the national treasury to cover a debt of almost two billion dollars (Barry 284). When he arrived in Miami, a U.S. Intelligence report placed his worth at nine million dollars (Christian 331).

With the Somoza family as well as most of the Guardia exiled from the country, the Sandinistas took control of the government--to American dismay. Earlier in 1977 and 1978, the U.S. State

Department report on human rights was very negative toward the leftist party, accusing them of continual human rights violations ("Dictatorships and Double Standards" 38). Then, when the Somoza dynasty fell, the United States expected the worst, fearing that there would be mass executions of the Guardia personnel as well as country-wide sieges to ensure that Somoza supporters were suppressed, but these actions never took place. There was no mass murder of the officials under Somoza and very little violence (Walker 60).

Pleased by the absence of a repressive action and hoping for a democratic government, the U.S. sent emergency food and medical aid and also promised economic assistance to the country (Rosati 137). The Department of State proclaimed that they would try to build a relationship of "mutual respect" with the people and the government of Nicaragua. The Sandinistas responded by enacting many reforms, such as a 1980 literacy campaign, in order to raise the level of poverty to which Nicaraguan citizens had fallen.

After the original takeover, the Sandinistas began to establish their own government. As the United States government changed hands and the Republican President Ronald Reagan took power, the Sandinistas were branded Marxist by Washington, and slowly U.S. support decreased. Turned down by the United States, the Sandinistas were forced to buy guns from the Soviet Union. America turned completely against the regime out of fear that a Communist government had been established in Nicaragua (Van Pulley 208). United States aggression began and many of the reform

programs had to be temporarily halted so that the regime could concentrate on the forces waged against them. The United States-supported contras, or "freedom fighters," who launched continual guerilla attacks in hopes that the Sandinista government would topple and a new government resembling the Somaza one would emerge. By the late 1980's, this support was essentially cut and the Contras were funded only by private sources. In 1990, a democratic election was held in Nicaragua and the FSLN lost the popular vote. It is still to be seen if the group will cede power to the President elect Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, but the signs seem to indicate that the FSLN will step down.

The Somoza dynasty which had been in control for forty-three years finally toppled, but tragically the United States continued trying to reinstate a government which was run by the Somocistas. The old regime repressed the people for the entire length of the dynasty with approval as well as aid from the United States. The original leader, Anastasio Somoza Garcia, was the first to gain the support of the U.S. This support strengthened his main power tool the Guardia, helping to hold his tight grip over the country. Coupled with holding the dictator comfortably in control, America began to send aid to the country which Somoza routed to his own bank accounts. Soon, he had amassed a huge personal fortune for himself and his family, while the natives in his country were left in a terrible state of poverty. After Somoza Garcia had been assassinated, both of his sons stepped into power. Luis was a much calmer leader than his father or his brother but ruled for only one

term. Next, Tachito stepped into office and began his ruthless reign, which was also supported by the U.S. Nicaragua became a Latin American pawn for the United States to use as an anti-Communist stronghold in exchange for military aid and other donations to the country, making Somoza the richest man in Central America. He used the Guardia in the same oppressive way that his father had, trying unsuccessfully to break the growing left-wing party. In 1979, the Sandinistas launched and won a revolution. The revolutionaries had triumphed over a dictator who had controlled the country for over forty years; sadly though, they had not really triumphed and were forced to continue to fight the U.S. funded Contras who were ultimately striving to reinstate a Somoza type government.

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