# An Introduction to "MANIFESTO, July 1, 1927" from *Sandino: The Testimony of a Nicaraguan Patriot, 1921–1934*, Augusto C. Sandino (Nicaragua, 1927)

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DOI: 10.5040/9781350302587.0056

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Augusto C. Sandino (1895–1934) was a Nicaraguan nationalist, patriot, and revolutionary who led an armed rebellion against United States military intervention in his homeland from May 1927 until his assassination by members of the US-created Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua (GNN) on February 21, 1934. The Sandino rebellion came at the tail end of the golden age of US imperialism in Latin America (1898–1934), a period marked by direct US military intervention across much of the circum-Caribbean—most prominently in Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Nicaragua.

One major consequence of the Sandino rebellion was the formation, for the first time in Nicaragua history, of a centralized and professional national military, the GNN. Its first Chief Director, Anastasio Somoza García, used his authority over that military first to engineer his own election as president in 1936, and then to found a dictatorial dynastic regime that lasted forty years (1936–79). The Somoza regime portrayed Sandino as a bloodthirsty psychopath and "bandit" (*bandolero*), in keeping with the language used by the US Marines during the intervention.

In the early 1960s, in the wake of the Cuban Revolution, a new generation of Nicaraguan revolutionaries resuscitated memories of Sandino's struggle and formed the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN). Their goal was to overthrow the Somoza regime and launch a Cuban-style revolution in Nicaragua. On July 19, 1979, after a long and bloody struggle, the FSLN toppled the regime of Anastasio Somoza Debayle, seized state power, and launched the Sandinista Revolution (1979–90). Sandino was quickly transformed into a national hero, his name and visage becoming ubiquitous across this small Central American country of three million people.

After eleven years of revolutionary turmoil, including the US-backed Contra War and a crippling US trade embargo, the Sandinistas were defeated in the election of 1990 and became junior partners in a series of coalition governments. In 2006, the Sandinista Daniel Ortega was elected president for a second time (the first was 1985–90) and aggressively consolidated state power. As of late 2023, he and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo, rule as co-dictators of an authoritarian regime. As this brief survey makes clear, the Sandino rebellion has proven pivotal to all subsequent Nicaraguan history.

Augusto C. Sandino was born in the village of Niquinohomo in the Pacific Coast region, the illegitimate son of Gregorio Sandino, a wealthy Liberal landowner of Spanish descent, and his Indian servant Margarita Calderón. In 1921, he fled into exile after shooting and wounding a political adversary, first to Honduras and Guatemala and then to Mexico, where he worked at a Standard Oil refinery near Tampico on the Gulf coast. In the early 1920s, Mexico was a burbling cauldron of revolutionary and ideological ferment in the wake of the Mexican Revolution (1910–20).

In a pattern similar to that marking the origins of Mexico's revolution, Sandino's rebellion in Nicaragua was born of violent divisions among factions of the elite combined with mounting grievances among the laboring poor in a deeply and increasingly unequal society. Bitter faction fights among and between Liberals and Conservatives were sharpened further by thirteen years of direct US military intervention (1912–25), with a small contingent of US Marines stationed in Managua to prop up a series of unpopular Conservative governments. In October 1924, Carlos José Solórzano was elected president at the head of a bipartisan Liberal-Conservative coalition. The US State Department felt that its overarching policy goal in this tumultuous Central American country—establishing "order and stability"—was largely achieved, and in August 1925 the US Marines were withdrawn. Two months later, the Conservative Emiliano Chamorro seized power in a coup d'état. By May 1926, ousted Liberals had risen up in rebellion, the US Marines returned, and the Civil War of 1926–7 had begun. Because the US government did not recognize the legitimacy of the Chamorro regime, in November 1926 the Nicaraguan Congress elected Conservative Adolfo Díaz as president (United States Department of State 1932).

As in Mexico in the 1910s, civil war created opportunities for charismatic military leaders to rise from below. Augusto Sandino was one such Liberal chieftain. Returning to Nicaragua from Mexico in mid-1926, Sandino sought work at the US-owned San Albino Mine in the mountainous northern region bordering Honduras known as Las Segovias. There, working as a pay clerk, he secretly recruited a band of rebels, who rose up in November as his Liberal revolutionary "army." His was but one of several dozen small, autonomous armed Liberal bands to emerge during this period. By April 1927, Sandino's forces had grown to nearly 1,000 troops and he had become one of a handful of leading Liberal generals under the nominal supreme command of Liberal General José María Moncada.

With Moncada's forces poised to enter Managua and overthrow the Conservative Díaz regime, the US State Department dispatched Special Envoy Henry Stimson to broker the peace. On May 4, 1927, in the town of Tipitapa on the shore of Lake Managua, under the shade of an Espino Negro tree, Moncada, Díaz, and Stimson agreed in principal to the terms of what became the Espino Negro Accord, or Treaty of Tipitapa. The treaty called for (1) both sides to disarm; (2) Díaz to remain as president until national elections under US supervision in 1928, after which US troops would be withdrawn; and (3) the creation of a "non-partisan constabulary" to keep the peace.

General Sandino was the only major Liberal military leader to reject the terms of the treaty and refuse to disarm. He and some twenty-nine diehard followers retreated back up north into Las Segovias, first to the town of Yalí, thence to San Rafael del Norte, where on May 18 he married local telegraph operator Blanca Aráuz. He then returned to the San Albino Mine where he had launched his Liberal uprising the previous November. In the words of the gold mine's owner, US citizen Charles Butters,

> On arrival at San Albino, about the end of May [1927], he appeared with a troop of about 50 men, stating that he had come for powder and to kill Americans. He demanded from me, upon pain of death, the delivery to him of 500 lbs. of dynamite, 1500 caps and 200 feet of fuse, with the repeatedly expressed object of killing Americans. I was obliged to furnish these articles. He thoroughly frightened our entire white staff. (Butters 1927)

Over the next few weeks, the rebel chieftain and his followers entrenched themselves at San Albino, gathering arms and supplies, mobilizing supporters, exacting retribution on foes, and even minting hefty gold coins inscribed with the words, "*Indios de A.C. Sandino*" on one side and "*R. de N. 10 pesos oro*" on the other ("Indians of A.C. Sandino" and "Republic of Nicaragua 10 pesos gold"). This act of minting gold coins symbolized the creation of a rebel republic, what Sandino conceived as a fully sovereign nation-state with its own lines of civil and military authority (Schroeder 1993).

On July 1, 1927, his forces firmly in control of the ransacked San Albino Mine, Sandino issued his first major manifesto, the document featured here, explaining and justifying his actions.

Perhaps the first thing to note about this manifesto is its distinctive tone: defiant, angry, fearless, self-righteous, self-important, heroic, epic, brimming with insulting epithets, vivid metaphors, and colorful language. In keeping with the hundreds of subsequent communications authored or uttered by Sandino, the manifesto tells a story populated by four main groups of actors: (1) *patriots,* that is, himself and members of his rebel army who valiantly defend the nation's honor against the (2) *traitors*, that is, Díaz, Chamorro, Moncada, and other native-born Nicaraguans who have sold out their homeland to the (3) *invaders*, that is, the US Marines, and (4) *the audience* to whom the manifesto is directed: Nicaraguans, Central Americans, and the "Indo-Hispanic race." The first three groups are engaged in an epic struggle centered on the notion of national honor or national sovereignty. Patriots defend the nation's honor, traitors and invaders violate it.

This notion of "national honor" represented an extension of Spanish and pan-Mediterranean cultural constructs of honor and shame, the subject of a vast scholarly and popular literature. A highly gendered, patriarchal notion of honor courses throughout this manifesto, with the nation's traitors depicted as "eunuchs," men whose cowardice and

treachery have effectively castrated them, leaving them without testicles or the testicular fortitude to defend the nation's honor. Indeed, their "horrid" actions have effectively denationalized them: they have "ceased to be Nicaraguans" and "killed their right to nationality." The nation or homeland is conceived as female, a "dark beauty of the tropics … violated by the Yankee adventurers," that is, raped by the US Marine invaders. Patriots, men who "know how to die like men," valiantly defend the honor of the female nation against both the "dastardly invader and the nation's traitors."

The audience to whom this manifesto is directed can be conceived as three increasingly inclusive concentric circles. First and most narrowly, it is directed to Nicaraguans, of which there were fewer than one million (according to the 1920 census: 638,119). The circle then expands to embrace all Central Americans, from Guatemala to Panama, and then, to the whole of the "Indo-Hispanic Race" (*la Raza Indo-Hispana*), in effect extending from Mexico to Argentina and embracing all of Latin America. Sandino's nationalism was also international or transnational: national borders existed but were subsumed within broader and more inclusive and essential identities.

This notion of an Indo-Hispanic race was part of a much broader intellectual current in Latin America and, indeed, across much of the Atlantic world in the first half of the twentieth century, that grappled with issues of race, blood, soil, and nation. In Latin America, that ideological ferment commonly falls under the headings of *indigenísmo* and *mestizaje* (indigenism and race-mixing). In 1925 in Mexico, for instance, the philosopher and education minister José Vasconcelos wrote of Mexicans comprising "the cosmic race" (*la raza cósmica*), a superior "fifth race" combining the most essential features of white, black, Indian, and Mongol races. In 1920s Peru, the intellectuals and activists José Carlos Mariátegui, Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, and others struggled to reconceptualize the role of Indians in the Americas, developing the notion of Indo-Americanism (*indoamericanismo*). In 1930s Brazil, the historian and writer Gilberto Freyre propounded the notion of a distinctive mixed-race nation combining African, Indian, and Iberian elements. In the United States, Jim Crow laws and the "one-drop rule" criminalized social and especially sexual intercourse between racial castes of whites and Blacks. In interwar Europe, fascists, most notoriously the Nazis in Germany, melded essentialist notions of race, blood, soil, language, and nation into seamless wholes, with unspeakably horrific consequences.

Like Vasconcelos and others, Sandino's conception of race was essentialist, as seen early on in the manifesto: the Indian blood in his veins "by some atavism encompasses the mystery of being patriotic, loyal, and sincere." Race, like blood, was something tangible, primal, and essential. Indeed, metaphors and imagery involving blood (*sangre*) comprise a major theme throughout Sandino's writings—in this manifesto alone are six direct references to blood and four to race. Yet in a critical sense, Sandino's conceptions of blood, homeland, and race were the diametric opposite of Nazi notions: while the purportedly superior Aryan race sought global domination of inferior races through social

policies of exclusion and subordination and expansionist wars of conquest, Sandino and his fellow Indo-Hispanics came "from the lap of the oppressed" and were compelled to wage a defensive war in defense of national honor and sovereignty. A powerful if vaguely formulated notion of class oppression courses throughout the manifesto.

One more of Sandino's references merits contextualizing here: the prospect of Nicaraguan transoceanic canal. From the early nineteenth century, the Nicaraguan elite had dreamt of a canal linking Atlantic and Pacific, thus locating their country at the commercial crossroads of the world. That dream dovetailed with that of US industrialists, financiers, and the federal government, as seen in the 1899 report of the Nicaraguan Canal Commission. The story of how the Panama lobby won the day in 1902 is a cliffhanger (Ameringer 1963).

Indeed, the main reason why the United States was so keenly interested in promoting "order and stability" in Nicaragua to begin with, and the main reason why it intervened militarily from 1912 to 1933, was directly related to the prospect of a Nicaraguan canal. After the 1902 decision to build the canal in Panama, the primary geostrategic objective of the US government in Nicaragua was to prevent the construction of another canal by an extra-hemispheric power that would rival Panama's and thus threaten US imperial interests across the circum-Caribbean, the Pacific, and East Asia. Contrary to a popular misconception, the United States did not intervene in Nicaragua to protect US investments, which in comparative terms were minuscule. Rather, it intervened primarily to prevent the construction of a rival canal. Ironically, since the 2010s the Ortega regime has aggressively pursued Chinese funding for the building of a Nicaraguan canal, the primary goal for its investors to foster greater Chinese access to American markets and resources, North and South.

## Further Reading

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