

## SOL NICARAGUA EDUCATION PACKET

Welcome to Seeds of Learning. We are delighted that you have made the commitment to participate in Seeds of Learning's (SOL) Work Group Program. SOL's Work Group Program is one of our many programs designed to promote conditions for quality learning in developing communities of Central America, while, at the same time, deepening your understanding of the rich cultural diversity, educational and socio-economic needs of communities with which you will be working.

Over the past nineteen years, SOL has worked with over 2,000 volunteers in Nicaragua and El Salvador. Volunteers like you, together with Central American community members and staff have helped to build 105 classrooms in 35 schools, assembled thousands of school desks and furniture, worked with scores of children in our sister schools on the construction site, shared, laughed, and learned so much about themselves and those around them. These work group volunteer contributions are integral to the success of SOL's work.

When you think of Seeds of Learning it is our hope you will not only think of the seeds of learning as those that SOL workgroups are planting by helping to build schools and to improve educational opportunities in Central America. We also hope that you will begin to think more and more about the seeds of learning being planted within you as you participate in the SOL work group program.

Working in Central America can be an incredibly fulfilling and life changing experience. But it is one that requires preparation and reflection. The social and economic realities of the country you will visit will undoubtedly call forth questions, reactions, and confusion. You will be prompted to analyze some of the overall as well as every day causes of the pervasive poverty that you will witness. These conditions are a product of a history that has been determined by geography, culture, politics, economics, and international relations, among other social forces.

Seeds of Learning staff have developed this packet to assist you in preparing for your SOL volunteer experience. The materials are intended to be a tool for you to learn more about the country where you will be volunteering. While some work group leaders may use it to lead pre-departure meetings, as well as in-country meetings; others may not. Whether with the rest of the group, or individually, we encourage you to read thru it, and reflect on the questions with your group, friends, or yourself.

We ask that you read all of the recommended readings as preparation for the pre-departure meetings and discussions. These will help you gain a basic understanding of the country you will visit and help contextualize your experience there. It has consistently been our experience that the more people educate themselves before they travel, the richer their experience will be.

It is our hope that you will find these questions and the following packet of educational materials useful in enriching your Seeds of Learning experience. We appreciate and welcome your feedback to help us improve our Work Group Education Program. Thank you for joining a SOL work group and helping SOL to fulfill its mission in Central America.

Mil Gracias- The SOL Staff

# Seeds of Learning Education Packet

## NICARAGUA

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## Section A - History, Politics, and the Struggle for Social Justice

Read from the following list and then discuss with your group the themes and observations using the discussion questions at the end of the section.

### **Recommended Readings:**

- 1) **A Brief Narrative History of Modern Nicaragua** (see below)
- 2) **Wikipedia:** General overview, (see sections on History, Politics, Geography)  
[//en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicaragua](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicaragua)
- 3) **Nicanet** Current news briefs in English, (sign up for free email list serve) [www.nicanet.org](http://www.nicanet.org)
- 4) **News** reporting and commentary, English and Spanish [www.tortillaconsal.com](http://www.tortillaconsal.com)

### **Recommended Videos:** (available from SOL or Netflix and YouTube)

(1) Nicaragua: An Unfinished Revolution An excellent 4-part documentary done by Al Jazeera and broadcast on July 17, 2009. Search **Nicaragua: An Unfinished Revolution part 1** on YouTube, if you type the title in you should have no problems finding parts 1-4, each about 10 minutes long. It's very well done and an extremely comprehensive political history that focuses on the revolution and where Nicaragua is today politically.

(2) Deadly Embrace: World Bank and International Monetary Fund in Nicaragua

After five years of IMF and World Bank assistance, Nicaragua experienced the worst economic collapse in its history. Deadly Embrace traces the history of U.S. involvement in Nicaragua, and its economic plight as influenced by the IMF, the World Bank and US agencies. Producer and Director Liz Canner combines outstanding footage of Nicaraguan people in their struggle to survive with an analysis of the IMF and World Bank policy known as structural adjustment. The film reveals the devastating results of relief provided to third world countries in economic decline.

(3) Hombres Armados (Men with Guns), (1997) John Sayles' social, religious, political, military realities in this movie, while being generic to the region, are very accurate to the general sentiment and complexity of the times. Set in an unnamed Central American country, it is the story of one man's discovery of what actually happened in the political history of his nation, and what happened to his students.

### **A Brief Narrative History of Modern Nicaragua - by Todd Evans and John Donnelly**

In the twentieth century, no country in Central America has had the combined degree of foreign intervention and entrenched dictatorship as Nicaragua. U.S. Marines actually occupied Nicaragua over a span of twenty-one years (1912-1933). Foreign and domestic policy was approved in two locations: the Presidential Palace and the American Embassy, a tradition that continued long after the marines left.

U.S. policy supported three generations of the Somoza family as rulers of Nicaragua (1936-1979) in order to assure a reliable ally. It is said that the Somoza family eventually owned half of the large businesses in Nicaragua, a comparable amount of land, and all protest or opposition to Somoza policy was eradicated by assassins or the National Guard. Roosevelt said of the first Somoza, "He may be a son-of-a-bitch, but at least he's our son-of-a-bitch."

### **1970s: Backlash and Revolution**

In the 1960s, an underground movement of protest began in Nicaragua. Taking its name from a national hero, Augusto Sandino, who fought against the U.S. occupation in the 1920s, the Sandinista movement withstood jailings and executions to emerge in the 70s as a broad-based protest against Somoza's policies. A 1972 earthquake virtually leveled the semi-modern city of Managua, the capital. Relief money poured in from the Red Cross and many countries. Somoza used much of this money to build up his own businesses. One such business, a blood plasma export business, was immensely corrupt. When the newspaper editor, Pedro Chamorro, exposed some of the abuses, he was assassinated. This event, more than any other, brought all social classes together in opposition to the Somoza dictatorship. Armed rebellion grew in cities north of Managua and eventually spread to the whole country. The Sandinista coalition of protest, now a dissident army, entered Managua on July 17, **1979** and drove Somoza out of the country. Many other wealthy landowners that had supported Somoza fled to Miami. The Sandinistas inherited a poverty-stricken country with high rates of illiteracy, homelessness, and insufficient health care.

The new government was comprised of nine representatives of the opposition (the Junta). Among them was Violeta Chamorro, the wife of the slain newspaper editor. The Sandinista representatives (those who had fought clandestinely for many years in the mountains and barrios) held the most power. It soon became clear that nationalization of large industries and the lands of the Somoza, the establishment of farming cooperatives, and absolute power for the Junta would dominate Nicaraguan politics in the future. Violeta Chamorro, born of a leading Nicaragua family, resigned in protest of the lack of democratic representation in government.

In many ways, the Sandinista power structure had the interests of the Nicaraguan people at heart. Many European countries, responsive to their idealism, sent funds and advisors. Health clinics, new schools, loans to farmers resulted. An ambitious adult literacy program, drawing on high school age students as the teachers, spread out through the country to bring the ability to read to one and all. Illiteracy was reduced from 50% to 12%.

### **1980s: Mid-Revolution and Contras**

As the Sandinistas asserted their power, the more radical aspects of their politics produced enemies. The abandoned estates, coffee plantations, cattle ranches, etc. provided the new government with an opportunity to give land to the poor peasants who before had just worked for the "patron." The "patron," now in Miami, sought ways to reverse history and eventually found bands of guerillas, soon called "Contras" to sew support in the mountains of Northern Nicaragua. The United States, that "good neighbor to the North" which had supported the Somozas until the end, became alarmed at the prospects of another successful popular revolution in the region—"another Cuba"! Within three months of taking office in 1981, the Reagan Administration suspended U.S. aid to Nicaragua and allocated \$10 million to arm and train the Contras for counter-revolutionary warfare. A southern front of opposition to the Sandinista government also was encouraged in Costa Rica.

After the U.S. invasion of Grenada in 1983, the Sandinistas became even more convinced that a U.S. invasion was being planned by the Reagan administration to drive them from power. Supported by the Soviet bloc, they developed a war machine of resistance, the largest army in Central America, both to push back the Contras and make the statement that an invasion would be resisted to the last ounce of blood. The word "struggle" (*lucha*) entered all Sandinista political rhetoric. The sad part is that so much money was poured into military preparedness that the once well-funded health clinics, literacy program, schools, even food resources, were drained off into the army. When I first went to Nicaragua in 1988, the airport was surrounded by helicopters, gun batteries and tanks at the ready. Military personnel were everywhere. It took an hour to have my credentials checked and get through customs.

Throughout the 1980s, then, the Nicaraguan economy suffered badly due to the war and military spending, a trade embargo and economic sabotage by the U.S., the mixed results of the Sandinista's effort to institute a new economic system, and unfavorable world economic trends for Nicaragua's agricultural exports. The result was a severe economic depression that lasted into the 1990s. Between 1981 and 1990, Nicaragua's gross domestic product per capita declined by 33.5%.

### **1990s: Faded Revolution**

The United States wanted a democracy in Nicaragua – an election. Daniel Ortega, the leader of the Sandinistas, had been elected president once in 1984 with 67% of the vote, but the United States did not deem this a fair election. In 1985, the U.S. imposed a trade embargo that lasted five years and strangled Nicaragua's economy. The Reagan administration pushed for an early new election as a pre-condition for a peaceful settlement of the war with the Contras and lifting of the economic boycott. Meanwhile, the U.S. support of the Contras continued secretly until the famous "Iran-Contra" scandal revealed the Reagan Administration had illegally sold weapons to Iran at inflated prices, and then funneled the profits to fund the Contras in Nicaragua.

A UN-monitored election was held in 1990. Nicaraguans were tired of war, tired of seeing their youth killed in the mountains, tired of the mandatory conscription of both young men and women into the army at age 18, tired of a United States economic boycott which cost them their previously largest trading partner. Nicaraguan industry, once reliant on USA manufacturing, could no longer get spare parts, and much of industry had to be overhauled. Many persons of all classes were also tired of the Sandinista monopoly on power. An opposition party was formed (UNO), consisting of 14 political parties, and Violeta Chamorro, the widow of the martyred *La Prensa* editor, was chosen as their candidate for president. She stumped throughout the country promising national reconciliation and peace. She won a stunning electoral victory.

### **UNO**

The UNO coalition of parties was not strong. On the one hand was a vocal element that wanted immediate return to private enterprise and a return of Somocistas from Miami to reclaim their land. On the far other side were the Communist and Marxist parties who were tired of being shut out by the Sandinistas. In between were various other political voices with their own interests, and Violeta Chamorro who had been elected as an agent of national reconciliation. This included reconciliation with the Sandinista party. The Sandinistas still controlled the labor unions and army, and Chamorro knew that they possessed the power to stop life in Nicaragua any time they wanted.

By the mid-1990s, Chamorro's failure to revive the economy, and her increasing reliance on Sandinista support, led to the election of Managua's mayor, Arnoldo Aleman in 1996. More than 23

presidential candidates and 32 parties participated in the elections. Both Aleman of the right wing Liberal Alliance and ex-president Ortega of the Sandinistas vigorously denounced each other while attacking the Chamorro administration. The Sandinistas finished second as an opposition party, continuing to favor moving more slowly to privatize government-run businesses, protecting the interests of the poor and organized labor, and pursuing a foreign policy more independent of the United States.

### **1990s: Economic Realities: External Debt and "Structural Adjustment" Policies**

By the early 1990s, Nicaragua had become one of the most heavily indebted developing countries in Latin America on a per capita basis—just over \$1300 per capita of foreign debt, or nearly three times Nicaragua's per capita annual income. With a total foreign debt burden of nearly \$6 billion, more than half of all government revenues in the post-Sandinista period had to be earmarked for external debt service payment. In 1997, for example, the government spent two and a half times as much on foreign debt payments as it did on health care and education combined. Much of Nicaragua's foreign debt was accumulated during the 1980s when the Sandinista government was forced to take out hefty loans, first in an effort to rebuild the country after successive Somoza family regimes left it bankrupt and in tatters, and later as a means to finance the war against the U.S.-backed Contras.<sup>1</sup> Following the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990, billions of dollars entered Nicaragua, but most of this has gone to making debt service payments back to foreign creditors.

Like many developing countries trapped in a deepening external debt crisis, Nicaragua was forced to restructure its economic priorities by adopting economic reforms in the early 1990s. Imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the U.S. government as a condition for obtaining debt relief and receiving further foreign aid, these economic reforms are known as "structural adjustment programs" (SAPs). SAPs require adoption of a package of "free-market/free-trade" economic policies aimed at restructuring an economy's public-private sector relationship. By downsizing the economic role of the public sector through government budget cuts, deregulation, and privatization, the private sector (markets and private enterprise) then becomes "freer" from government interference so that the "magic of the marketplace" can presumably accelerate development.

In other words, taking the SAP "medicine" (sometimes referred to as "shock therapy") is suppose to restore the "economic health" of countries, putting them back on a path of external debt repayment and sustainable economic growth. However, the IMF/World Bank's SAPs have proven to be highly problematic and controversial throughout the developing world. The results of SAPs have been mixed and uneven. SAPs promise long-term economic gain (lower deficits and inflation, higher export-led economic growth, etc.). But, as seen above in the case of Nicaragua, SAPs require a government to go on an austere economic diet, thereby imposing short-term economic hardship or pain on much of its population. While positive macroeconomic outcomes of lower deficits and inflation may result along with revived GNP growth rates, the severe austerity measures dictated by SAPs typically have lead to the erosion of real wages, rising unemployment, and to increases in poverty and inequality. Also, the increased emphasis given to boosting exports often conflicts with environmental sustainability as production of exports from the natural environment (cash crops, wood products, fish, etc.) is accelerated.

A World Bank study based on the 1995 census found that 82% of the population lived in conditions of generalized poverty. Illiteracy in rural areas is up to 43%--a two-fold increase over the 1985 levels. Unemployment today is estimated at 60%. Poverty and joblessness have forced 40% of the economically active population to seek work outside the country. Shantytowns of immense

proportions have sprouted up around Managua as people try to get some economic benefit from the revitalization of businesses and foreign investment that has begun to rejuvenate the capital. At stoplights, ten people will approach your car with something to sell. Begging and prostitution, never in evidence in the 80s, is now common.

Out in the countryside, the peasants are poorer than ever. They are now required by the SAP to pay the school system a small stipend to send their kids to school. Loans to farmers are not easily available, and the shelves of health clinics are bare.

### **Las Mercedes Free Trade Zone and Sweatshop Factories**

Within the past decade, Nicaragua has tried to compete with many other poor, developing countries by providing multinational corporations with low-wage "free trade zones" in textiles and clothing assembly—so-called "sweatshop factories" (check the labels on your clothes to see where they have been made—e.g., Gap, Sear's, Wal-Mart, Fruit of the Loom, etc.!). The "Las Mercedes Free Trade Zone," about a mile from Managua's airport, now has nearly two dozen clothing assembly factories that contract to make brand-name apparel for retail chains. Typically, labor costs are 10 percent of the retail price of clothing sold in the U.S. For example, free-trade zone workers earn about 20 cents for a pair of jeans selling at Sear's, Target, or Wal-Mart for \$21-\$34. Of course, given the poverty and high rates of unemployment, people are desperate to obtain whatever jobs are available—even if they are in low-wage, "sweatshop factories" where working conditions and workers' rights are eroded in the name remaining "globally competitive"!

### **Hurricane Mitch**

In late October 1998, Hurricane Mitch, one of the worst hurricanes of the century, pummeled Central America, causing extensive mudslides and flooding, washing out roads, bridges, and burying villages throughout the region. Already devastated by years of war, poverty and structural adjustment, Nicaragua now had to deal with a natural disaster that not only killed thousands, but also left millions homeless and without the means to survive. However, the scope of the devastation far exceeded what can be simply attributed to "natural" causes. The impact of impoverishment and the agro-export economy that has contributed greatly to Nicaragua's environmental destruction turned an unusual weather pattern like Mitch's into a catastrophe. In addition, because of Nicaragua's huge external debt payments and the SAPs, the government had cut expenditures of its public agencies by 30-90% in real terms since 1994. These budget cuts greatly reduced the capacity of government agencies (civil defense, police, fire brigades, and health clinics) to warn communities of the coming hurricane, and then to respond promptly and properly to the devastation.

The hurricane tragedy did lead several nations to cancel Nicaragua's debt in late 1999. The U.S. government implemented a multifaceted program of direct aid, debt relief and temporary relief for immigrants from Nicaragua and Honduras—the two countries especially destroyed by Mitch. Moreover, Nicaragua and Honduras have now been classified by the IMF as Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC), thereby making them eligible for further debt-service relief on World Bank and IMF loans.

**2000-Present** - (Please look to other sources to educate yourself about the recent history.)

## **The Future**

Nicaragua is potentially one of the richest countries in Central America. It has an abundance of arable land, the lowest population density in the region, considerable hydroelectric, thermal and fossil energy potential, and significant timber and mineral resources.

It also has access to two oceans and possesses lakes and rivers positioned in such a way as to make an ideal location for a second trans-isthmus canal. Psychologically, Nicaraguans have never experienced political freedom. Leadership has resided with the very few. Therefore, in order for Nicaragua to access its many natural resources and use them wisely, a tremendous amount of internal education is necessary and a willingness to put aside long-standing party strife that has usually led to civil wars.

## **Attitudes toward North Americans**

Work Group volunteers also wonder if Nicaraguans bear resentment for the way that they have been treated by the United States. No! They most graciously are able to differentiate between neighbors and friends to the north and the past policies of the government. Nicaraguans are very friendly. They love baseball. It is the national sport, and they follow the pitching exploits of their native son, Dennis Martinez, with great interest.

By coming to Nicaragua to undertake productive work, North Americans have the opportunity to redress some unfortunate episodes in the history between these two countries. Bring pictures of your families to share, be ready to share small pleasantries, be ready to work together or take time to play with a child. You will be rewriting history.

\* The first edition of this paper was written by Todd Evans in early 1994. An up-dated, revised version, drawing on the reading resources listed below, was completed by John Donnelly in early 2001.

## **Discussion Questions to consider:**

- 1) If you were asked to give a brief history the U.S. relationship with Nicaragua, highlighting changes and shifts in U.S. involvement with Nicaragua. What would you highlight or emphasize in your brief report?
- 2) How do you think U.S. free trade policies, foreign aid, and military assistance policies have impacted the economic and political development of Nicaragua? For better or for worse?
- 3) Can you explain how U.S. foreign policy toward these countries has been shaped and determined over time in terms of the dynamics of our own American political-economic system? Do you think that North American citizens bear any responsibility for the economic and political conditions in Nicaragua?

## Section B - Economic and Social Themes

Inflation, CAFTA, trade policies, minimum wage, job opportunities, privatization, migration, remittances, sweatshops and globalization are all themes that have immediate implications for Nicaraguans and are important to study both before your trip and while you are there. These are all complicated issues, so begin by learning some of the basics. Read the web links and articles below and then discuss with your group some of the questions at the end of this section.

### **Recommended Readings:**

- 1) **What is Fair Trade? / How "Fair" is Fair Trade?** (See below)
- 2) **The Inter Religious Task Force on Central America (IRTF): Economic Justice, Sweatshop Labor and Fair Trade** [www.irtfcleveland.org/economicjustice/](http://www.irtfcleveland.org/economicjustice/)
- 3) **Remittance Trends** [www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?id=393](http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?id=393)

### **Recommended Videos:** (purchase online)

"Dying to Live" is a profound look at the human face of the immigrant. It explores who these people are, why they leave their homes and what they face in their journey.

<http://www.nd.edu/~latino/dyingtolive/film.shtml>

### **What is Fair Trade?**

Fair trade is an organized social movement and market-based approach to alleviating global poverty and promoting sustainability. The movement advocates the payment of a fair price as well as social and environmental standards in areas related to the production of a wide variety of goods. It focuses in particular on exports from developing countries to developed countries, most notably handicrafts, coffee, cocoa, sugar, tea, bananas, honey, cotton, wine, fresh fruit, and flowers.

Fair trade's strategic intent is to deliberately work with marginalized producers and workers in order to help them move from a position of vulnerability to security and economic self-sufficiency. It also aims at empowering them to become stakeholders in their own organizations and actively play a wider role in the global arena to achieve greater equity in international trade.

Fair trade proponents include a wide array of international religious, development aid, social and environmental organizations such as Oxfam, Amnesty International, and Caritas International.

Like most developmental efforts, fair trade has proven itself controversial and has drawn criticism from both ends of the political spectrum. Some economists and conservative think tanks see fair trade as a type of subsidy. Segments of the left criticize fair trade for not adequately challenging the current trading system.

## How "Fair" is Fair Trade?

In a strange turn of events it seems the protesters got exactly what they wanted. Companies like Starbucks are joining the fair trade movement. In 2000 there were hundreds of anti-Starbucks protests staged across the United States. Starbucks was targeted by fair trade activists who were enraged by the profitable company's buying habits, which left their producers in poor countries barely able to eke out a living. In these demonstrations, protesters called Starbucks the "the evil empire" and tried to shame them for their exploitation of poor farmers in the name of corporate greed. They demanded that Starbucks join the Fair Trade movement. In a strange turn of events it seems the protesters got exactly what they wanted. The 'evil empire' now has fair trade stamped on its coffee! Starbucks is part of a growing trend as more and more large corporations are calling their products "fair trade". In the past year Nestle, Proctor & Gamble, Dunkin' Donuts, and now Wal-Mart's Sam's Club have all decided to produce fair trade lines of coffee. But this raises the question: are the protesters satisfied with their corporate lattes? More importantly, do coffee farmers stand to gain from Corporate America's sudden embrace of Fair Trade?

The term 'Fair Trade' has come to be interpreted differently by different companies. Unlike the term "organic" which is regulated by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the labeling of a product as "Fair Trade" does not have a strict definition or certification process. In reaction to this, TransFair USA, a non-profit, non-governmental organization introduced itself in 1999 as one of the strongest voices in the fair trade movement. They offered a standardized certification process and label to producers and consumers. They also whittled down their definition of fair trade to a few core requirements: fair prices for farmers, decent living and working conditions for workers, workers organized as democratic decision-making bodies like co-ops, and farming done using sustainable growing practices. Along with offering certification, TransFair launched a huge marketing campaign to promote sales of certified Fair Trade products. In the past few years public awareness of fair trade issues and product sales have seen amazing growth.

TransFair measures its success by their products growing popularity. It tells wholesalers that certifying their product with a TransFair label is a great way to tap into the booming market for specialty coffee. According to TransFair promotional materials the certified fair trade market grew 53% in 2003, and continued to grow by 20% in 2004. TransFair prefers to tout their success in sales and not in terms of actual improvements in the quality of life of the farmers that produce the coffee. It should come as no surprise that a company preoccupied with market growth would gladly join forces with the large multinational corporations who are concerned with increasing sales.

In 2002 the price of coffee dropped tremendously on the world market, forcing some farmers to sell their coffee for less than it cost them to grow the beans. With free trade and fierce market competition it seems that even coffee wholesalers like Nestle began searching for a more stable pricing scale, which is offered by TransFair certification. Companies like Starbucks claim they are selling fair trade products to appease their occasionally riotous consumers. But many cynics believe these large corporations are simply trying to protect themselves from falling coffee prices.

Just before the global marketing campaign of TransFair was launched, an alternative fair trade movement had begun. This political movement was started on a small scale by wholesalers, like

Larry's Beans, who describes fair trade as "more than an equitable way to buy fantastic coffee from farmers who put their hearts and souls into growing it - it was an alternative economic model," and even "a way to connect people from all corners of the world." Small scale roasters in the United States formed direct relationships with the farmers' co-ops that provided them with green coffee beans. Those involved looked at fair trade as a way of empowering producers, (since consumers already have buying power), and shifting money from rich countries to poorer countries. These alternative coffee roasters and farmers consider themselves to be dealing in "fair trade" regardless of TransFair certification.

The small roasters who tout their product as being 100% fair trade now wonder what will happen to their sales as they begin to compete with multinational corporations who dabble in fair trade. Many complain that businesses like Starbucks can call themselves "fair trade" while only 1 to 2% of their coffee is actually fair trade certified. Others worry about what will happen when fair trade is no longer a hot topic and big producers decide to move on to some other trend in novelty coffee. During the 2005 Future of Fair Trade Conference the leaders in the industry were divided. Some sellers welcomed the increase in fair trade sales. They hoped to ride on the coattails of what they expect to be an expensive marketing campaign launched by corporate coffee to promote their new 'socially conscious' line. Others who consider themselves purists decided to break away from TransFair USA and a certification process they no longer believe marks an alternative to traditional trade.

If current figures in market growth continue, fair trade will continue to grow in popularity within the United States. The effect of a growing number of "Fair Trade" consumer options is yet to be seen. At this point the Fair Trade movement is still relatively young and even dedicated companies that work directly with farmers in other countries have had difficulty measuring the effect fair trade has had on the local farming communities they hope to aid and empower. The biggest change has been in the level of awareness consumers are being encouraged to have. For decades most Americans have bought products without considering where they came from or how the global economy, which brought them cheaper prices, affects the producers on the other end of the economic spectrum. At this point, changes in farming communities are slow to develop, and many hope that as the fair trade spreads consumers will start to think... "If this coffee is considered fair trade what is my chocolate, cereal, gasoline, clothing,... are they unfair trade?" and they will start to seek out more alternative products.

Source: <http://www.globalenvision.org/library/15/833> October 26, 2005

### **SECTION B –Questions to consider:**

- 1) What is the difference between "free" trade and "fair" trade, and the pros and cons of each?
- 2) What do you think accounts for the high and persistent level of poverty and economic inequality in Nicaragua? What role would you say population growth has played in perpetuating poverty?
- 3) How are these economic realities directly or indirectly affecting you? As an investor? As a consumer? As a global citizen?
- 4) How do you think that the work that SOL has been doing in Nicaragua might relate to the broad economic conditions there?

5) How would you explain why so many Nicaraguans have immigrated to the United States, or still want to? What are the causes and consequences of migration for Nicaragua?

6) How is the natural environment been impacted by the development and economic trends in Nicaragua?

## **SECTION C - Culture, Food, and Arts**

Read this poem and any other books or articles from the last page in this packet. Come prepared to discuss what you have learned and share some Central American cuisine and music in preparation for getting a 'taste' of Nicaragua at your last group meeting.

### **Recommended Poetry Reading:**

**"The Peasant Women from Cua"** by Ernesto Cardenal (see below)

**Music:** Use the local library or the internet to listen to some Latino music, including popular Nicaraguan genres: salsa, merenge, reggaeton, ranchero, traditional music, and bachata

**Food:** Search for Nicaraguan recipes online and prepare them for your final group meeting. Try to make the traditional enchiladas or gallo pinto and a fresh fruit 'refresco' beverage

**Spanish:** Practice some key phrases with your group this evening and try to speak Spanish as much as you can. Use the Basic Spanish guide on the SOL website as a guide.

### **"The Peasant Women from Cua" by Ernesto Cardenal**

The Nicaraguan priest and poet Ernesto Cardenal was declared an outlaw in 1977 by the Somozan government because of his political activism. When a new Sandinista government was appointed in 1979, he was made Minister of Culture and served in this capacity until 1988. In "The Peasant Women of Cua," he portrays the hardships of the peasant women, mostly mothers, who are harassed by soldiers about the whereabouts of the village boys, who are presumed to be Sandinista rebels.

The Peasant Women From Cuá

Now I'll tell you about the cries from Cuá

cries of women like pangs of birth

María Vencia, 90 years old, deaf, half dead

shouts at the soldiers, I haven't seen any boys

Amanda Aguilar, 50 years old

with her daughters Petrona and Erlinda

I haven't seen any boys

like pangs of birth

--Imprisoned three months straight in a mountain barrack-  
Angela García, 25 years old and seven children,  
Cándida, 16 years old, suckles a baby girl  
very tiny and underfed  
Many have heard these cries from Cuá  
wails from the homeland like pangs of birth  
When she left jail, Estebana García, mother of four,  
gave birth to another. She had to give up her children  
to a landowner. Emelinda Hernández, 16 years old,  
her cheeks shiny with tears,  
her braids wet from crying ...  
They were captured in Tazua as they came from Waslala  
the cornfields in flower and the yucca full-grown  
the patrols came and went with prisoners  
They sent Esteban up in a helicopter  
and soon after returned without him ...  
They carried off Juan Hernández  
one night, and he never came back again  
Another night they took Saturnino  
and we never saw him again ... then they took  
Chico González  
it was the same almost every night  
at the hour the cocorocas sing  
even people we didn't know  
Matilde aborted sitting down  
when they questioned her all night long about the guerrillas  
A guardsman called to Cándida  
come here and wash my pants  
but he wanted something else  
(Somoza smiled in a picture like  
an Alka-Seltzer ad)  
Worse ones came in an army truck  
Three days after they left Cándida gave birth  
This is the story of the cries from Cuá

sad as the cocoroca's song  
the story that the peasant women from Cuá tell  
that they tell in tears  
as though glimpsing a jail behind the mist of rears  
and above the jail a helicopter  
"We know nothing about them"  
But they have seen  
their dreams are subversive  
bearded, hazy in the mist  
quickly  
fording a stream  
concealed in the cornfields  
taking aim  
(like pumas)  
springing from the tall grass!  
beating the guardsmen  
coming to the farm  
(dirty and triumphant)  
Cándida, Amanda, Emelinda  
so often, at night in dreams  
--with their knapsacks--  
climbing a mountain  
with happy-go-lucky songs  
María Venancia, 90 years old  
at night in their dreams they see the boys  
in strange mountains  
so often at night in dreams  
they see the boys.

Source:<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/0,,contentMDK:20161136~isCURL:Y~menuPK:373757~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:336992,00.html>

## **SECTION C –Questions to consider:**

- 1) What did you learn from the additional readings you have done?
- 2) What do you notice about the Latin and Central American music and “flavors” of the art and food that you have experienced so far?
- 3) How has Nicaraguan culture, art, music, and food been changed or lost as people have migrated across borders? Consider the deeper implications of losing cultural roots which is a common result of migration.
- 4) What are some Central American cultural influences that are alive in the community where you live? How authentic are these cultural expressions?

## **Additional Reading Suggestions for Nicaragua**

- 1) Nicaragua in Focus: A guide to people politics and culture by Hazel Plunkett
- 2) The Death of Ben Linder: The Story of a North American in Sandinista Nicaragua by Joan Kruckewitt
- 3) The Country under my Skin and A Memoir of Love and War by Gioconda Belli
- 4) Selected poems by Ruben Dario

## **Recommended Websites:**

- 1) Nicaraguan News in English      [www.envio.org.ni/index.en](http://www.envio.org.ni/index.en)
- 2) Washington Office on Latin America, News and discussions promoting to human rights, democracy and Social Justice      [www.wola.org](http://www.wola.org)
- 3) The InterReligious Task Force on Central America      (IRTF): Economic Justice, Sweatshop Labor and Fair Trade [www.irtfcleveland.org/Links.htm](http://www.irtfcleveland.org/Links.htm)
- 4) Latin America Working Group: Advocacy group whose mission is to encourage U.S. policies towards Latin America that promote human rights, justice, peace and sustainable development [www.lawg.org/countries/central\\_america/intro.htm](http://www.lawg.org/countries/central_america/intro.htm)
- 5) Nicaragua Education statistics      [www.nationmaster.com/country/nu-nicaragua/edu](http://www.nationmaster.com/country/nu-nicaragua/edu)
- 6) Nicaragua Education statistics      [www.childinfo.org/files/LAC\\_Nicaragua.pdf](http://www.childinfo.org/files/LAC_Nicaragua.pdf)
- 7) Fair Trade and CAFTA      [www.TheFairTradeFederation.org](http://www.TheFairTradeFederation.org), [www.TransFairUSA.org](http://www.TransFairUSA.org), [www.Fairtradeusa.org](http://www.Fairtradeusa.org)