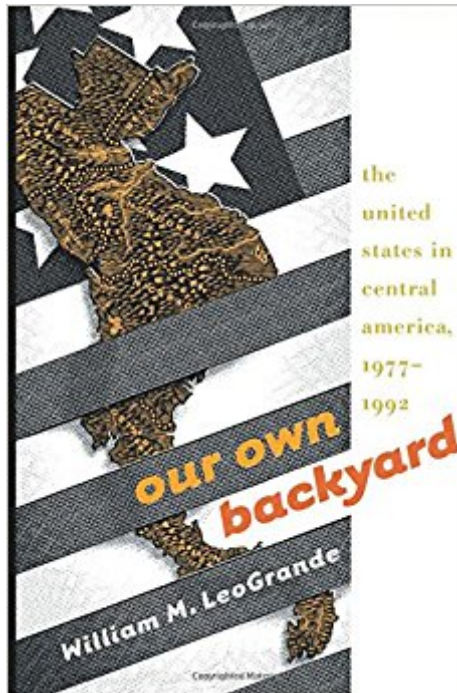


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Our Own Backyard: The United States In Central America, 1977-1992



Synopsis

In this remarkable and engaging book, William LeoGrande offers the first comprehensive history of U.S. foreign policy toward Central America in the waning years of the Cold War. From the overthrow of the Somoza dynasty in Nicaragua and the outbreak of El Salvador's civil war in the late 1970s to the final regional peace settlements negotiated a decade later, he chronicles the dramatic struggles--in Washington and Central America--that shaped the region's destiny. For good or ill, LeoGrande argues, Central America's fate hinged on decisions that were subject to intense struggles among, and within, Congress, the CIA, the Pentagon, the State Department, and the White House--decisions over which Central Americans themselves had little influence. Like the domestic turmoil unleashed by Vietnam, he says, the struggle over Central America was so divisive that it damaged the fabric of democratic politics at home. It inflamed the tug-of-war between Congress and the executive branch over control of foreign policy and ultimately led to the Iran-contra affair, the nation's most serious political crisis since Watergate.

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Customer Reviews

Leogrande documents the strong role the United States played in El Salvador and Nicaragua during the civil wars in these countries. He apologizes for excluding Guatemala because that would make his necessarily long work even longer. The actions of all players - the CIA, State Department, National Security Council, the Sandinistas, the Contras, the FLMN (Salvadoran rebels), the Organization of American States (OAS), and many others - are presented in a detailed narrative which illuminates the extraordinarily intricate background behind the headlines. As such it shows the

tremendous power, resources and determination the United States has for controlling events south of its border. Though lengthy, I found this book extremely absorbing for I experienced history coming alive on its pages. Leogrande has produced a valuable work which will no doubt appear on any major bibliography on US policy in Central America.

LeoGrande's academic analysis of the U.S. military involvement in Central America is the best account yet of the U.S. foreign policy towards Central America during the Eighties. Although, his focus is on El Salvador and Nicaragua, it is the painstaking assessment of the relations of the U.S. and El Salvador during the 1980s that makes this book valuable to its readers. Regarding El Salvador, the theme of the U.S. foreign policy was simple: support the Salvadoran military to stop the marxist-led FLMN guerrillas even if the military's death squads engage in massive human rights violations. The book should be useful not only to those interested in Central America, but also to those who live with, work with and do business with Central Americans in the United States. The Civil War in El Salvador displaced over 1 million persons, most of whom fled to the United States. During the Salvadoran Civil War, about 60,000 people died. The children and grandchildren of Salvadorans who were able to make it to the U.S. should find LeoGrande's book as an excellent introduction to the reasons why their forebears came to the United States. LeoGrande's book is informative, engaging and insightful.

I served in El Sal and Honduras with Operation Royal Duke. This is the only book that documents this operation and many others during this era. If you are curious as to what was going on then this is the reference for you. However, it is very detailed and slow reading. It is also written by a critic of that "war", so understand that his perspective.

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