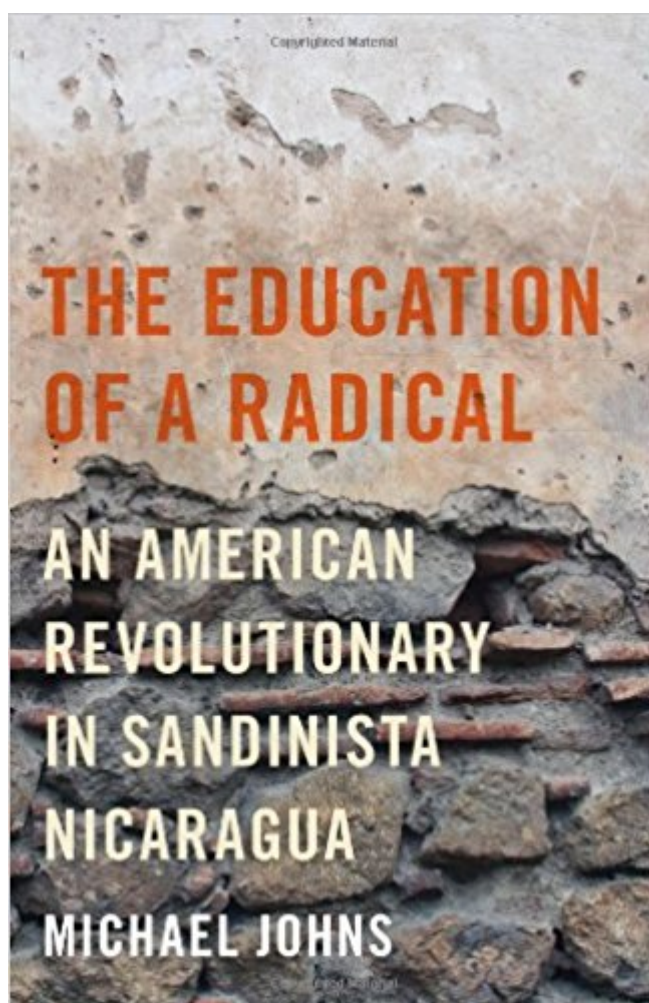


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The Education Of A Radical: An American Revolutionary In Sandinista Nicaragua



Synopsis

"I went to Nicaragua with nothing but a tourist visa, \$1,500 in cash, the name of someone at the Agrarian Reform Ministry, and the idea of being a revolutionary intellectual. . . . The idea took hold in a simple character flaw: wanting to believe that I knew better than everyone else." —From the preface

When Michael Johns joined a Sandinista militia in 1983, a fellow revolutionary dubbed him a *rÃfÃbano*, a radish: red on the outside but white on the inside. Now, more than twenty-five years later, Johns appreciates the wisdom of that label as he revisits the questions of identity he tried to resolve by working with the Sandinistas at that point in his life. In *The Education of a Radical*, Johns recounts his immersion in Marxism and the Nicaraguan sojourn it led to, with a painful maturation process along the way. His conversion began in college, where he joined a student group called the Latin American Solidarity Association and traveled to Chiapas, Mexico, for research on his senior thesis. Overwhelmed by the poverty he witnessed (and fascinated by a new friend named Maricela who was trying to turn peasants into revolutionaries and who carried a heavily highlighted copy of *Late Capitalism*), he experienced an ideological transformation. When a Marxist professor later encouraged him to travel to Nicaragua, the real internal battle began for him, a battle that was intensified by the U.S. invasion of Grenada and its effect on the Sandinistas, who believed they were the next target for an imminent American invasion. Before he knew it, Johns was digging trenches and learning how to use an AK-47. His intellectual ideals came face-to-face with revolutionary facts, and the results would perplex him for years to come. Bringing to life a vivid portrait of the sometimes painful process of reconciling reality with romanticized principles, *The Education of a Radical* encapsulates a trove of truths about humanity, economics, and politics in one man's memorable journey.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"It's a gutsy, revealing story that compels readers to question their own motivations and beliefs. Though there is no doubt that some may be uncomfortable with John's personal revelations, criticisms of Marxism, and portrayal of the revolution, his is a story well told." (The Americas 2013-07-01)

Michael Johns is Professor of Geography, University of California, Berkeley, and the author of *The City of Mexico in the Age of Discovery and Moment of Grace: The American City in the 1950s*.

Naïve conceit, that is, of our youth told twenty years of earned wisdom later. Part adventure story, part confession/repudiation/apology. Even an uneager student of political history can enjoy the read and learn something memorable about the sway of falling in with a doctrine.

In the preface, Johns complains that a Sandinista leader in 1991 wasn't seeing "reality" clearly enough, because the Sandinista guy was still blaming the "big bad beast" of US imperialism, instead of blaming the stupidities of the Sandinista approach to land reform. I am not annoyed that Johns criticizes Sandinista land reform, which I'm sure was pretty dumb in both conception and execution, but I am quite annoyed that he doesn't seem to see that blaming US imperialism is as valid a story as blaming the Sandinistas. Johns wants to be Orwell and Voltaire; I was interested in his experiences, but he seems to have fallen into the illusions of disillusion, and it is hardly news that Marxism has its problems. I was too cynical as a young person to be a Marxist, but I find myself longing, as I get older, for SOME counterbalance to the reigning ideology of world-weary free-marketeers. Actually, socialism is great! And it IS arguably the fault of the big bad beast of US imperialism that socialism has so often failed! In any case, the book is not Orwell, but it is readable.

I haven't read this book. I probably never will. However, I did read the sample pages. The author is a disaffected Communist or Marxist who supported the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua, but ended up demoralized, etc, etc. The usual stuff. However, what captured my attention was his mocking attack on Sandino, the revolutionary nationalist who fought the U.S. Marines in the 1930's. Apparently, Sandino was a "political oddball", a "mystic, a visionary, a hearer of voices, a believer in reincarnation". Sandino was the official representative in Nicaragua of the Magnetic-Spiritualist

School of the Universal Commune, which blended Zoroastrianism, Kabbalah and Spiritism with the politics of communism and anarchism. The result was a "spiritism of Light and Truth", which would usher in a new and final dispensation of human history. Sandino's rebel army used a symbol showing a pyramid, the Star of David and an anchor surrounded by a sunburst. This is supposed to be criticism?! Sounds like my kind of guy! I knew that Sandino was politically closer to anarchism than to Marxism, but this was the first time I heard that he was also an occultist. In my younger days, the local "anarchists" (libertarian socialists) used to annoy the local Marxists by pointing out that Nicaragua's revolutionary hero was really an anarchist. Clearly, they didn't know half of it! Now we do. Am I being flippant, you probably wonder? Maybe. And then, maybe not...

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