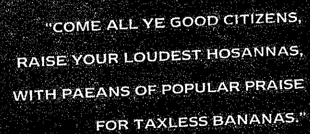


George Black
The Good Neighbor
(NY: Pantheon 1988)

BANANA REPUBLICS

1918–33

AN ABSOLUTE NATIONAL MORALITY IS INSPIRED
EITHER TO WITHDRAW FROM "ALIEN" THINGS
OR TO TRANSFORM THEM: IT CANNOT LIVE IN COMFORT
CONSTANTLY BY THEIR SIDE.
—LOUIS HARTZ,
THE LIBERAL TRADITION IN AMERICA

In the early decades of the twentieth century, it seemed as if all America, caught up in a new dietary fad, agreed with Benjamin Disraeli's conviction that "the most delicious thing in the world is a banana."

When domestic sales taxes on bananas were removed in 1913, there was an outpouring of festive verse in the newspapers, and banana recipes abounded. The fruit was cheap, exotic, and nutritious, and the region it came from would henceforth be wrapped in cliché as the land of the "banana republics."

The first samples of the fruit—just thirty bunches—had reached New York from Havana aboard the schooner *Reynard* in 1804, but it remained a rare luxury until the turn of the century. The most famous of the banana giants, the United Fruit Company of Boston, was incorporated in March 1899; with operations soon in place in Cuba, Jamaica, Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, Pan-

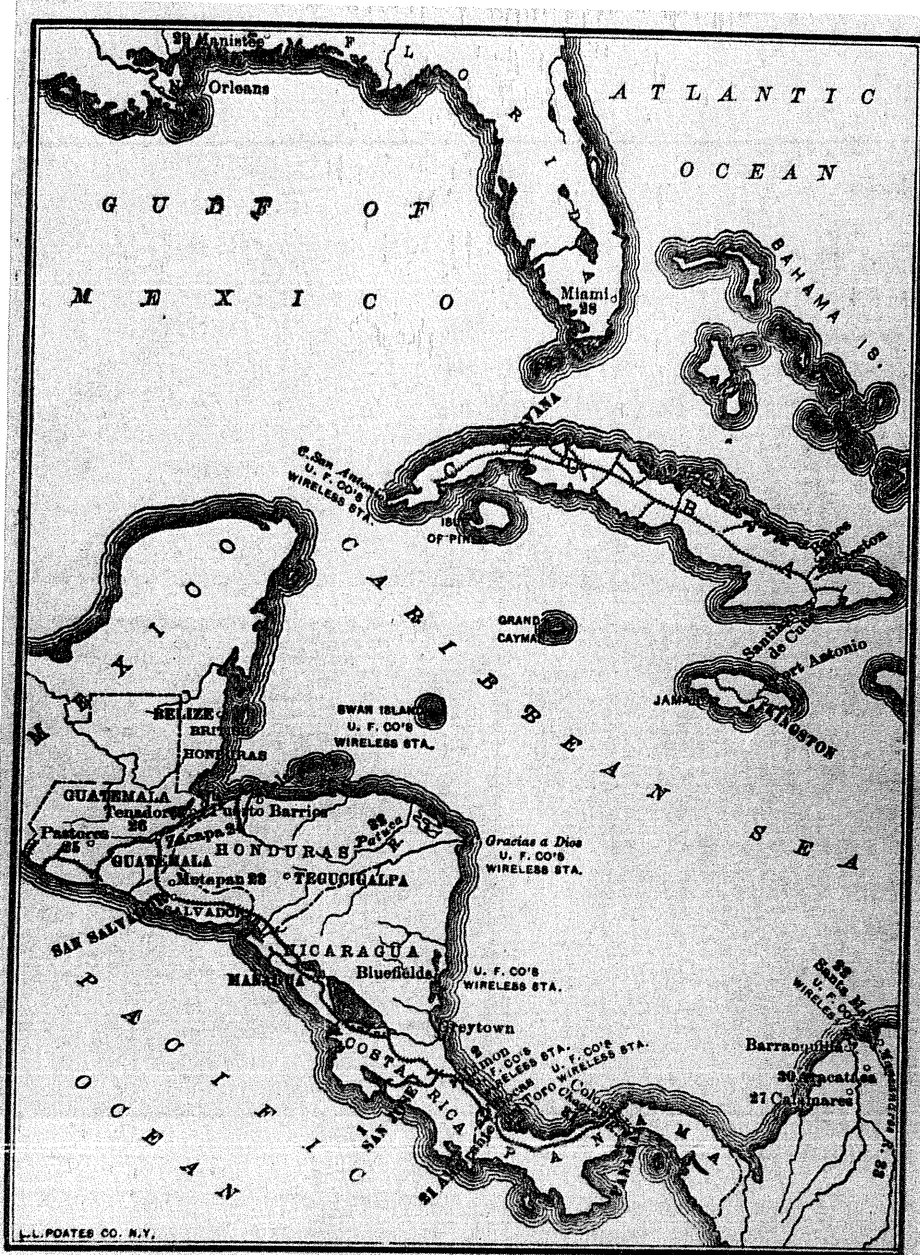
ama, and Colombia, it was the largest agricultural enterprise in the world. Its rival, Standard Fruit, controlled the banana trade in Nicaragua.

With the Spanish-American War behind it, and advantageous financial arrangements worked out with the countries of Central America and the Caribbean during the Taft years, the federal government stepped into the back-ground, to be called upon as an enforcer only when necessary. Americans in the region devoted themselves enthusiastically to Calvin Coolidge's belief that the business of America was business. The image they presented to Central Americans was the man in the white tropical business suit, with the marine uniform held in reserve.

Minority opinion in the United States, echoing a widespread sentiment in Latin America, saw the fruit companies as the ugly face of Yankee imperialism. But the businessmen could always rely on a steady stream of favorable publicity—much of which they generated themselves. A typically lyrical account of the banana trade was Frederick Upham Adams's 1914 *Conquest of the Tropics,* which Doubleday Books of New York published as the first volume in a series titled "The Romance of Big Business." For at least four decades, United Fruit and its competitors appeared as the emblems of progress in the tropics. Although in one sense they were the direct descendants of the southern plantation expansionists of the mid-1800s, the fruit companies represented a new kind of corporate enterprise. Their shareholders reaped enormous profits from the companies' use of advanced agrarian technologies and their embrace of the new ideas of labor efficiency that made Frederick Winslow Taylor a household name. Like the builders of the Panama Canal, the fruit giants imposed order on a vast scale. Where there had been wilderness, they built schoolhouses and hospitals and workers' settlements of neat wooden houses, turning inhospitable jungles into company towns.

The arrival of the fruit companies often brought the host countries their first real infrastructure. In Guatemala, for example, United Fruit built (and owned) the main highways, the railroads, and the only port on the Caribbean coast. It handled cable communications throughout the region, and traveling news reporters relied on the company's Tropical Radio to send their dispatches. "It is in Guatemala," wrote W. J. Showalter in *National Geographic,* "that one begins properly to appreciate the great civilizing influence of a much-maligned American corporation—the United Fruit Company. . . . It is the advent of such organizations as these—powerful enough to protect their own interests when disputes with local government arise—that spells the economic salvation of these countries and promises an honest wage to the laboring classes." Sovereignty, in other words, was a lower priority than progress and order.

The other side of the coin for Showalter was that the natives showed no sign of this entrepreneurial drive. In Nicaragua, which most commentators of the day agreed was a special basket case, "they have had revolutions since the memory of the inhabitants runneth not to the contrary. There seems to be

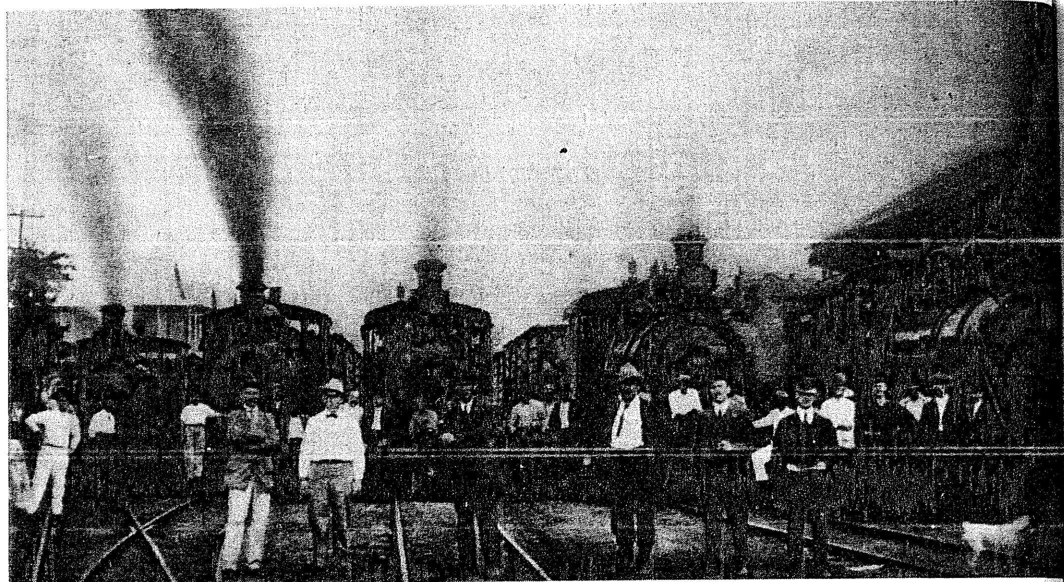


WHERE THE BANANAS COME FROM

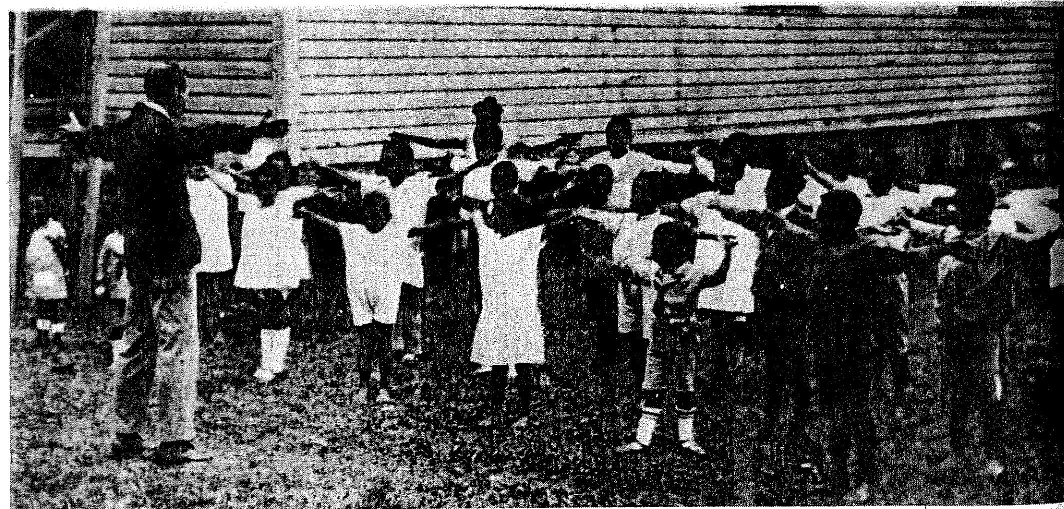
Here is the key to the above map:

No. 21, "Almirante," a bay and also a town in Panama.
No. 22, "Santa Marta," a city on the north coast of Colombia.
No. 23, "Metapan," a town in San Salvador.
No. 24, "Zacapa," an important railroad centre in Guatemala.
No. 25, "Pastores," a town in the western part of Gautemala.
No. 26, "Tenadores," the junction of two rivers in Central Guatemala.
No. 27, "Calamares," a town in Colombia.
No. 28, "Miami," a bay and town in Florida.
No. 29, "Manistee," from several sources in the United States.
No. 30, "Aracataca," a town in Colombia.
No. 31, "Chagres," the Panama River that the engineers of its canal had to harness.
No. 32, "Patuca," a river in Spanish Honduras.
No. 33, "Manzanares," a river in Colombia.

"THE FRUIT COMPANY, INC.
RESERVED FOR ITSELF THE MOST
SUCCULENT,
THE CENTRAL COAST OF MY OWN
LAND,
THE DELICATE WAIST OF AMERICA.
IT RECHRISTENED ITS TERRITORIES
AS THE 'BANANA REPUBLICS'
AND OVER THE SLEEPING DEAD,
OVER THE RESTLESS HEROES
WHO BROUGHT ABOUT THE
GREATNESS,
THE LIBERTY AND THE FLAGS,
IT ESTABLISHED THE COMIC OPERA."
—PABLO NERUDA.



"BRINGING BANANAS TO THE AWAITING FRUIT SHIP. HERE ARE FIVE BANANA TRAINS WHERE A FEW YEARS AGO WAS AN UNBROKEN AND DEADLY WILDERNESS."
—*CONQUEST OF THE TROPICS*, 1914.



"THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE JUNGLE AND THE DIVIDEND-PAYING PLANTATION IS ONE OF ORGANIZATION, CAPITAL, ADMINISTRATION, AND TOIL. ADD THESE TO THE JUNGLE AND YOU HAVE THE PLANTATION."
—GEORGE A. MILLER, 1919.

little hope that they will ever be able to give themselves a good government." Such a waste, Showalter lamented, for "here one sees a thousand opportunities for the development of great wealth. . . . Given good governments, then no countries on the map would afford greater opportunities for profitable investments than those of Central America." Good governments or not, U.S. corporate investments blossomed twentyfold between 1897 and 1929. The largest share, more than $80 million, was in Honduras, the quintessential banana republic.

Though the companies and their propagandists spoke loudly of order and progress, their operations in the field were often run by cowboys and rogues.

If any one man gave birth to the banana-republic stereotype, it was Sam (the Banana Man) Zemurray, a Bessarabian immigrant to the United States who started his career by buying overripe bananas from United Fruit and peddling them in New Orleans. In 1910, he bought up fifteen thousand acres of Honduras's Caribbean coast. The following year he joined forces with former president Manuel Bonilla and an American mercenary named Lee Christmas to overthrow a Liberal regime that had offended the State Department by getting up to its neck in debt to Britain and becoming too friendly with the Nicaraguan leader Zelaya. Zemurray, Bonilla, and Christmas landed their troops at Trujillo, O. Henry's old stamping ground, and the U.S. consul named a new president of Honduras.

In their north-coast enclave, the banana companies received five hundred hectares of free land for every kilometer of railroad they built. The result was a serpentine maze of tracks that crisscrossed the flatlands of the coast, but no railway was ever laid to serve the capital city, Tegucigalpa. In this splendid isolation, the companies ran Honduras much more effectively than the central government. U.S. dollars became legal tender. Lee Christmas was named commander-in-chief of the Honduran Army, and later was rewarded with the post of U.S. consul.

Until 1929, when United Fruit bought out Zemurray, Honduran politics were little more than disputes between elite factions loyal to one or another fruit company. United Fruit's dominance after 1929 was mirrored by the emergence of the National Party of Tiburcio Carías Andino, the first of the great dictators who ruled the region through the 1940s. Though visitors like Showalter lamented the lack of "good government," the companies seemed

GENERAL LEE CHRISTMAS, 1907. "WHAT A MAN—WHAT A FIGHTER! A REVOLUTION WAS INCOMPLETE WITHOUT HIM." —F. A. MITCHELL-HEDGES.

to do their utmost to prevent it from taking root, locking local politicians into the parasitic behavior the Americans claimed to deplore. H. V. Rolston, of United Fruit's Cortes Development Company in Honduras, told his lawyer in 1920 that it was "indispensable to capture the imagination of these subjugated peoples, and attract them to the idea of our aggrandisement. . . . It is in our interest to make it our concern that the privileged class, whom we will need for our exclusive benefit, bend itself to our will; in general, none of them has any conviction or character, far less patriotism; they seek only position and rank, and on being granted them, we will make them hungry for even more."

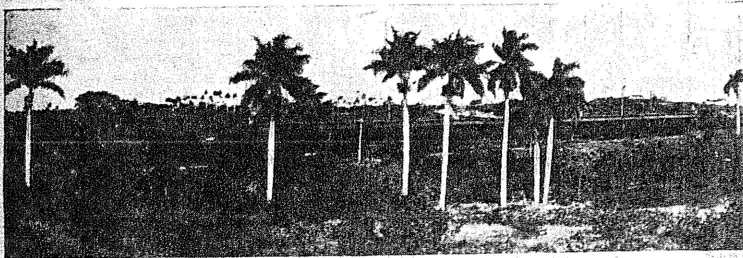
The companies proposed to "capture the imagination of the subjugated peoples" in the same way they won the admiration of readers back home—through material improvements, social benefits, and high wage rates in a country where most of the population faced a life of squalor and disease. But the paternalism must be kept in perspective: the high wages were designed to attract the best workers to the torrid lowlands and then keep them out of the clutches of labor unions. A large slice of their wages went straight to the company store. Even as it provided benefits that no local employer could match, United Fruit shipped out profits that were almost equal to the entire Honduran national budget.

Bananas were not United Fruit's only crop. In Cuba, the company ran two great sugar mills, the Central Boston and the Central Preston. The company town was Birán, just outside Mayarí. "Few places in Cuba were quite so dominated by the North American presence," wrote Hugh Thomas. "The United Fruit Company's employees had a polo club, swimming pools, shops for U.S. goods. Even the post office and rural-guard headquarters were on company land. The company had its own force of twenty field soldiers, licensed to bear arms. At both Boston and Preston there were schools and hospitals, and every possible amenity." One worker on the United Fruit railroad was an immigrant from Galicia in Spain named Ángel Castro, who looked after company property after the marine intervention of 1917. In 1926, on the family farm at Birán, Ángel Castro's second wife and former cook, Lina Ruz González, gave birth to a son, Fidel.

Besides being the sugar bowl of the Caribbean, Cuba had another destiny in the minds of Americans. Its potential as a tourist paradise had been foreseen in 1898. As José de Olivares, one of the official chroniclers of the Spanish-American War, had predicted, "With the ultimate success of the sanitary and moral reforms which are now being introduced, it must eventually become one of the most attractive and popular winter resorts." Just a steamship ride away from the ports of the eastern seaboard, there were beaches and golf courses and a country club, the finest tobacco in the world, and "the most charming trolley line in the tropics." The accommodations, transportation, and services were U.S.-owned; the waiters and drivers spoke English. As an educational bonus for the children, there were wartime battlefields to visit,

Quaint and Beautiful Cuba

A WINTER PARADISE



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Matanzas	15	4.50	Antilla	15	36.17
Cardenas	15	7.50	Santiago de Cuba	15	36.17
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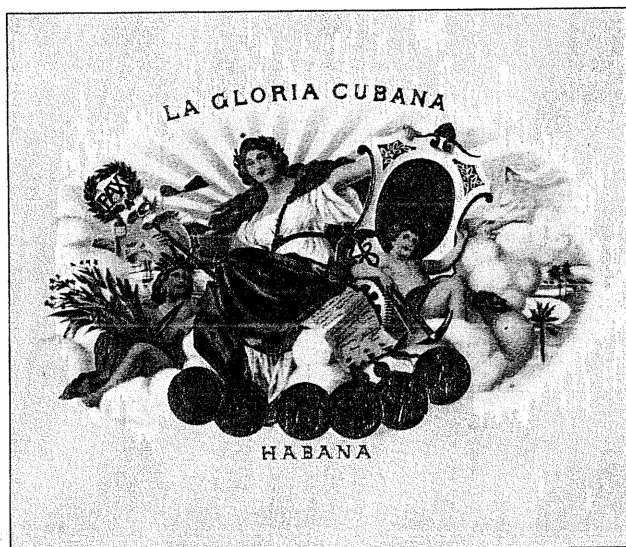


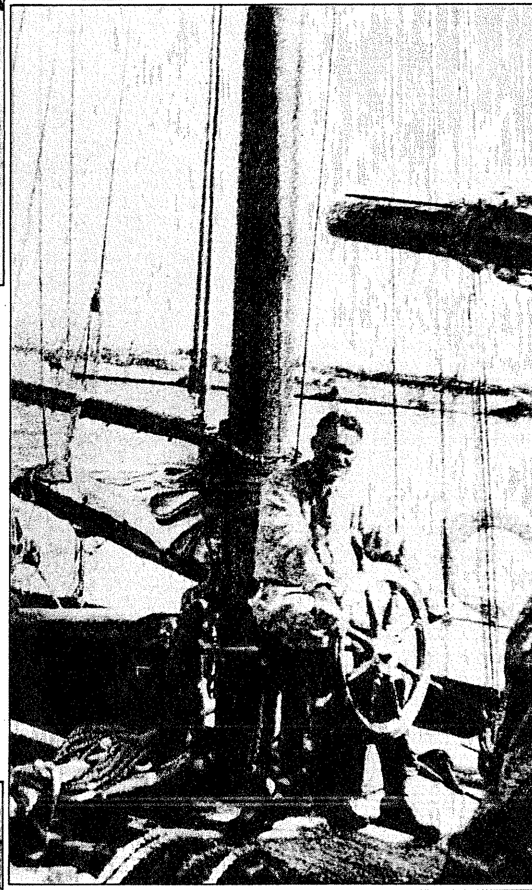
TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY CIGAR LABEL. "THE BEST COURSE THAT SPAIN CAN TAKE TO REPLENISH HER EXCHEQUER IS TO SELL THE ISLAND OF CUBA TO THE UNITED STATES. IT IS OBVIOUSLY IMPOSSIBLE THAT THE WEAKEST POWER OF THE OLD WORLD CAN LONG RETAIN THE RICHEST ISLAND OF THE NEW. LET HER YIELD GRACEFULLY TO HER 'MANIFEST DESTINY.'" —*RICHMOND DISPATCH*, JANUARY 1854.

like San Juan Hill and, until it was dredged up in 1911, the wreck of the *Maine*. Above all, there were the glories of the capital city, which de Olivares called "beautiful, iniquitous Havana—the Nineveh of the closing century, the Gilead of the next."

-- -- --

The Marine occupations in the Caribbean brought news of even more exotic destinations, including Haiti and Santo Domingo, where Wilson sent troops in 1915 and 1916, respectively. Haiti had been terra incognita to most Americans, though it was only six hundred miles away. As the first black republic, founded in 1804 after Toussaint L'Ouverture's revolt in 1791, it had been seen as a frightful omen by the slave states. Southerners spoke with dread of a "second Haiti," much as modern administrations talk of a "second Cuba," and the most recalcitrant of the slaveowners pointed to the chaos and bloodshed of the revolt as proof that blacks were bestial and incapable of self-government. Since the Civil War, Haiti had suggested the mysteries of voodoo, and little else.

Haiti became known to a mass audience in the late 1920s and early 1930s, however, through the exploits of a folk hero named Faustin Wirkus, "a blond, tough, Pennsylvania former miner-boy in American Marine Corps uniform." Wirkus had arrived in Port-au-Prince aboard the USS *Tennessee* in August 1915. "Join the Marines and See the World," Wirkus wrote in his autobiography, published in New York in 1931. "It seemed to be my only chance to get away from the Dupont section of the Pittston coal mining district, in Pennsylvania, where I was born. . . . There was supposed to be something going on in Haiti—wherever that was—which called for the 'Marines to land, and take the situation in hand.' . . . A lot of my companions, I know, thought



THE KING GOES ABOUT HIS BUSINESS
Three modes of travel for a Marine on duty in Haiti.

FAUSTIN WIRKUS IN HAITI.
"WHEN A MAN HAS STINTED
AND ECONOMIZED ALL HIS LIFE
ON A NEW ENGLAND HILLSIDE
AMID STONES AND STUMPS,
THE JUNGLE TAKES THE LOAD
OFF HIS SOUL AND SETS HIM FREE
IN A UNIVERSE OF NEW
AND UNTESTED DIMENSIONS."
—GEORGE A. MILLER, 1919.

"WIRKUS AND LA REINE JULIE: THE FIRST DEPUTY QUEEN UNDER TI MEMENNE, DRESSED IN CLOTHES WIRKUS BROUGHT HER FROM THE STATES."

that Haiti was in the Samoan group; others thought it was merely 'somewhere south of Suez.' "

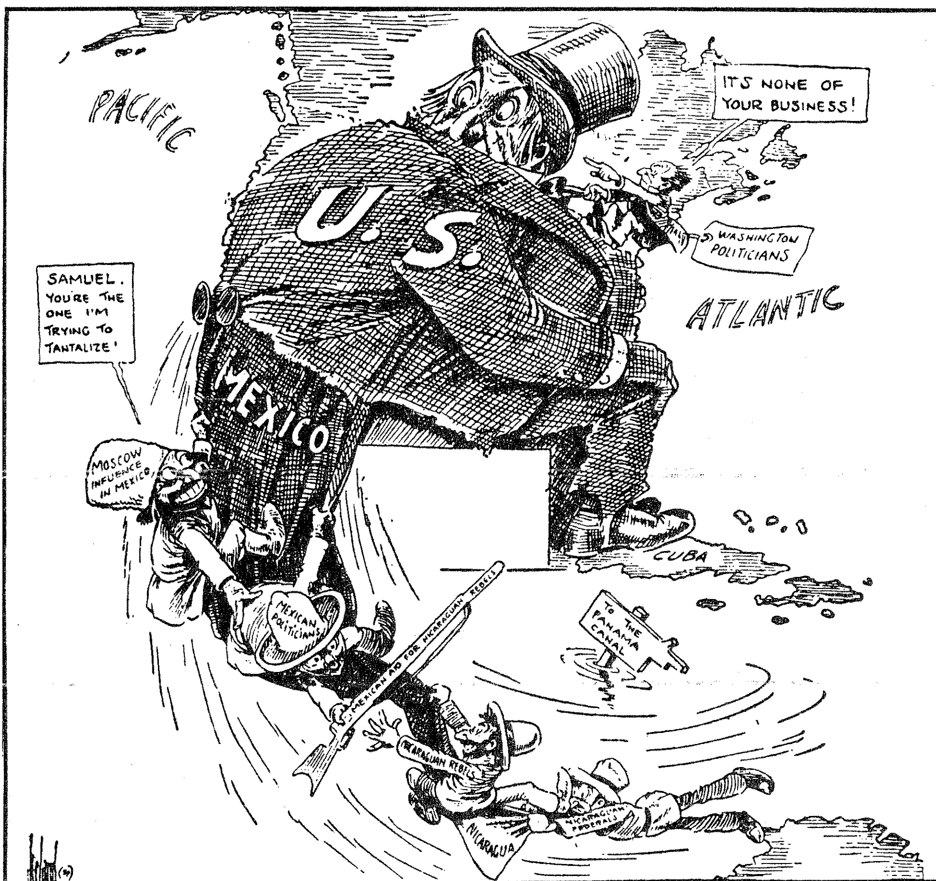
The rookie marine was invalided out in 1916 with a broken arm but chose to go back three years later to join the Haitian *gendarmerie*. He was posted to La Gonave, the island province across the bay from Port-au-Prince, which had a reputation as "a God-forsaken hole inhabited by savages." The island had its own kind of autonomous monarchy, with a queen called Ti Memenne and a "first deputy queen," La Reine Julie. Wirkus was the first white man many of the islanders had seen, and they crowned him king. As monarch, he recalled, he was known "for being fair and an 'easy boss,' though exacting and dangerous to lie to or disobey." He brought Deputy Queen Julie clothes from the United States, and dressed her as a flapper for a visiting photographer. When visitors arrived from the U.S. military, Wirkus would welcome any ladies in the party "by having them installed as honorary queen for the night and sit by me to watch the natives dance."

Back home, his story, written up by William B. Seabrook, an authority on voodoo, proved a sensation. "A surprising number of people . . . were interested in voodoo," Seabrook said, "but taking the immense American public by and large, they formed a very small minority compared with the number of people who were interested in Wirkus. . . . At least ten million people had

heard of Wirkus and La Gonave, had seen his photograph." Major magazines such as the *Literary Digest* and *Collier's*, as well as the big Sunday newspaper syndicates, carried features on the "White King of La Gonave." His story, Seabrook wrote, was an American myth as potent as that of Horatio Alger. It "contained the essence of the dreams of small boys and grown-up men stifled by a too-close-pressing strait-jacket of civilization-limitation."

Wirkus stayed on his island as king until March 1928, when Haiti's president, Louis Borno, and the U.S. high commissioner, General John H. Russell, paid a call. Wirkus was relieved of his post, and Borno declared, "Haiti is a republic. I am its president. It is unthinkable that there should be a kingdom within a republic or a 'king.' " Wirkus took the boat home to write a highly successful memoir of his royal years.

The marines withdrew from Nicaragua in August 1925. But the troops were back within the year after renewed political upheavals: the collapse of an unstable coalition government; a Conservative coup; the reinstallation of the former mine treasurer Adolfo Díaz as president; and finally the declaration of



"THE TROUBLE IS AS CLOSE TO HIM AS HIS OWN COAT-TAILS."
—*COLUMBUS DISPATCH*, 1927.
"FOR THE MOMENT, THE QUESTION OF MEXICAN INTERFERENCE IN CENTRAL AMERICAN COUNTRIES, PRESUMABLY FOR THE PURPOSE OF FOSTERING RADICAL PROPAGANDA AND BOLSHEVIST PHILOSOPHY, HAS SWEPT OFF THE STAGE OTHER QUESTIONS PENDING BETWEEN MEXICO AND THE UNITED STATES."
—*NEW YORK TIMES*, NOVEMBER 18, 1926.

a provisional government by the Liberals on the Atlantic Coast. The situation was chaotic, and when the marines went back in, the action was unpopular at home.

The pundit Walter Lippmann wrote a scalding commentary in the *New York World* at the end of 1926. Nicaragua was "not an independent republic," Lippman wrote, and "the direction of its domestic and foreign affairs are determined not in Nicaragua but in Wall Street." Even so, Lippmann seemed to anticipate that not even his Olympian reputation could penetrate his readers' mental block about American conduct. "We continue to think of ourselves as a kind of great, peaceful Switzerland," Lippmann lamented, "whereas we are in fact a great, expanding world power. . . . Our imperialism is more or less unconscious."

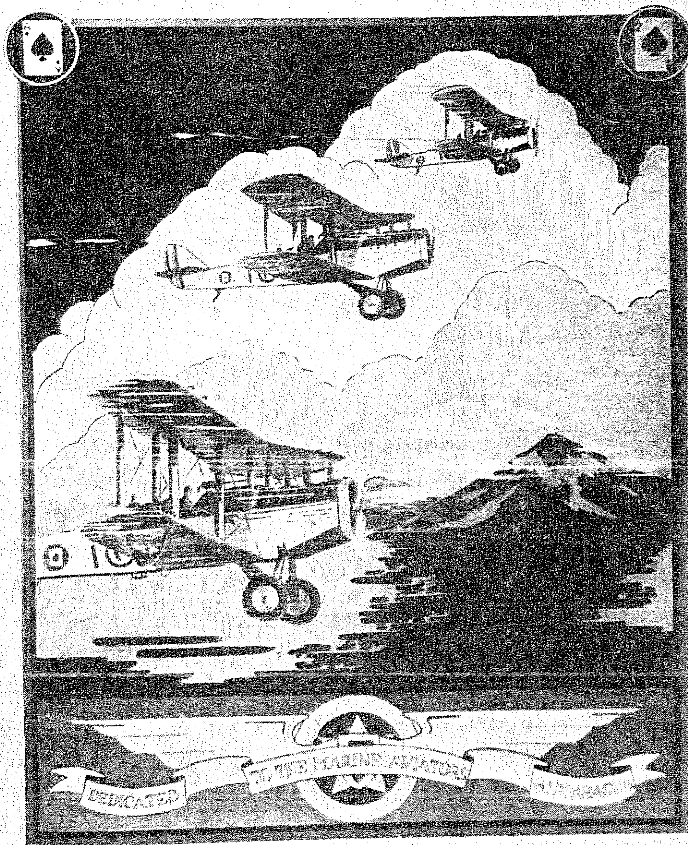
Eager to rally public support for his unpopular Nicaragua policy, President Coolidge declared that the problem was outside interference. The culprits this time were the Soviet Union and, closer to home, Mexico, which was then in bitter dispute with Washington over plans to nationalize foreign oil companies. Coolidge announced that he had "conclusive evidence" of arms shipments to the Nicaraguan Liberals from Mexican ports. Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg then presented the Senate Foreign Relations Committee with a paper titled "Bolshevist Aims and Policies in Latin America," alleging a Nicaraguan-Mexican-Soviet conspiracy to impose a "Mexican-fostered Bolshevist hegemony" within striking distance of the Panama Canal.

The cartoonists of the day went to town with the image. They showed Mexico dispensing "Bolshevik Red Eye," or chasing Nicaragua—usually depicted as a barefoot ragamuffin—with a goat labeled "Bolshevik propaganda." But the Russian Information Bureau retorted, "The Soviet Government has no more interest in factional political squabbles in Nicaragua than it has in the mountains of the moon," and Lippmann scoffed, "The thing which the ignoramuses call Bolshevism is in essence nationalism, and the whole world is in ferment with it."

For Díaz in Nicaragua, things were going from bad to worse. Liberal troops controlled most of the Atlantic half of the country, and were closing in on major cities on the Pacific side. Their advances in the North owed a good deal to the efforts of troops under a charismatic young commander named Augusto César Sandino, who, like most of his Liberal peers, had taken the title of general. Sandino's persistence and discipline convinced the marines that he must be receiving outside support—a charge that in later years would be leveled at any persistent guerrilla movement. As evidence, Colonal Louis Mason Gulick (who later gave his name to the huge U.S. military base in Panama) pointed to the fact that "the bandits wore khaki uniforms, instead of their former nondescript rags."

The marines' role was to act as a shield for the Nicaraguan government. But Díaz's demoralized troops were battle-shy, and the United States public grew fearful that American soldiers would end up in the thick of the hostilities. In response to these anxieties, Coolidge sent special envoy Henry L. Stimson, who had made his reputation as secretary of war under Taft, to

Managua to resolve the conflict. Nicaragua, previously seen as a squalid backwater, was now a diplomatic flash point, and a certain romance attached to that. In a volume published in 1928, travel writer Arthur Ruhl excoriated "the curious short-sightedness of the occasional young 'career diplomat' who fancies that the Caribbean posts are somehow beneath his talents, and that Managua, in particular, is a cruel and unusual punishment." In fact, Ruhl believed, "the chance the younger men have to do something real are quite different. . . . With local government more or less a family affair, he can go directly to the president and get things done which, in Europe, might take months of negotiation. . . . It is quite big enough a post to be taken seriously, even by the most gilded of our young Talleyrands—and even though at some official function the local caterers may commit the incredible crime of serving red and white wine in the same glass."



U.S. MARINES IN NICARAGUA.
"AN EXCHANGE OF PLEASANTRIES IS MORE FAVORABLE TO LASTING FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN NATIONS THAN PONDEROUS PRONOUNCEMENTS OF POLICIES OR PLANS."
—KENT COOPER, GENERAL MANAGER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, 1928 SPEECH ON U.S.-CENTRAL AMERICAN RELATIONS.

U.S. OFFICER AND HEAD OF "THE BANDIT CHIEF SILVINO HERRERA." "THERE IS A STRONG FEELING HERE THAT MISTAKEN HUMANITARIANISM ON OUR PART HAS PREVENTED THE ELIMINATION OF SANDINO." —HAROLD DENNY, *NEW YORK TIMES* DISPATCH FROM MANAGUA, 1928.

Under a blackthorn tree in the town of Tipitapa, on May 4, 1927, Stimson brought the warring factions together. It took less than half an hour, he wrote, for them to reach an understanding: in exchange for U.S.-supervised elections the following year, and the creation of a "nonpartisan" National Guard of the sort being formed in the Dominican Republic and Haiti, the Liberals would lay down their arms. Their negotiator was José María Moncada, a man who had once acknowledged, "We Nicaraguans are accustomed to designate the State Department as the arbiter of our fights and differences."

Sandino, the only Liberal commander to reject the pact, withdrew to the mountains of Jinotega, near the Honduran border. Within two months, he gave an impressive show of strength by laying siege to the town of Ocotal, and was dislodged only by the Marine Air Corps, who gave the first display of aerial dive-bombing in military history (the distinction is often mistakenly granted to the fascists' attack on the town of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War, immortalized in Picasso's 1937 painting). Sandino recognized that

he was helpless against this kind of military force, and retired to wage a guerrilla campaign from a mountain stronghold called El Chipote.

The *New York Times*, then as now, set the tone for what Americans learned. Its correspondent, Harold N. Denny, later wrote a book critical of U.S. policy. For the moment, however, he portrayed the war as a black-and-white struggle: on one side, savagery and disorder; on the other, technology and progress. His disdain for Nicaraguans was undisguised: they were "charming, but in many ways so futile." He called Sandino "perhaps a patriot, probably unbalanced, but certainly a poseur." There was no denying that Sandino's men fought well, but Denny thought the explanation was racial: "The Nicaraguans are better fighters than the Haitians, being of Indian blood, and as warriors similar to the aborigines who resisted the advance of civilization in this country." Sandino's troops, he commented in one dispatch, were "men who could kill with ferocity unknown to any white soldier."

On the U.S. side, he appreciated the experimental quality of the war. "From a tactical standpoint," he wrote in January 1928, "the present activities furnish the first practical laboratory for the development of post-war aviation in coordination with ground troops." Denny was flown around the country by marine aircraft. The "obliging warriors against Sandino," he reported, were "rugged, hearty, and in good spirits." The marines were also learning the art of press relations in a combat zone, and their own publicity played heavily on the image of the brave, clean-limbed troops and their shining battery of modern air power: seven Loening flying boats, six Vought Corsairs, and five Fokker trimotor bombers.

The hunt for Sandino's remote headquarters at El Chipote was rather like the search that Frances FitzGerald describes in *Fire in the Lake* for a "reverse Pentagon" in the jungles of Cambodia, which, if found and destroyed, would alter the course of the Vietnam War. In Nicaragua, after a nightmarish search, facing insects, ambushes, and the floods and mists of the rainy season, the

"A MOVING-PICTURE THEATER EXHIBITS RECENT RELEASES. THERE ARE TENNIS, HANDBALL, AND BASKETBALL COURTS, AND THERE IS A RECREATION HALL WITH A PLAYER PIANO, A PHONOGRAPH, AND A LIBRARY OF 1,000 BOOKS, FROM WHICH SELECTIONS ARE SENT REGULARLY TO THE OUTPOSTS IN THE HILLS."
—HAROLD DENNY, DESCRIBING THE MARINE HEADQUARTERS IN NICARAGUA, 1928.

Leathernecks finally located Sandino's base camp in January 1928 and attacked it with wave upon wave of aircraft and ground troops. Denny called the aerial bombing of El Chipote "one of the most exciting day's works since the Sandino operations started," and told his readers that Sandino was dead or grievously wounded. However, when the marines reached the peak, they found nothing but a collection of straw dummies wearing the red-and-black neckerchieves of the rebel army.

But on February 3, journalist Carleton Beals tracked down Sandino in the town of San Rafael del Norte and became the first and only American correspondent to interview him. He told Sandino's story in six weekly installments in the *Nation*, causing a sensation in the United States and Europe. Even before Beals, the U.S. government had complained bitterly of a pro-Sandino bias in the press. Stimson had been angered in 1927 by the "comparative superiority of facility enjoyed by revolutionist propaganda in reaching America," but thought he had the explanation: the Sandinistas were strong in the east of the country, which gave them access to the Caribbean ports and so to the American press. In fact, most of the copy from Managua came from the wire services, and their resident correspondents could hardly have been accused of "revolutionist" sympathies. United Press's Clifford W. Ham had also served, in 1917–28, as the U.S.-appointed collector general of customs, at a salary of $10,000. And Colonel Irving A. Lindberg of the rival Associated Press was his deputy and successor.

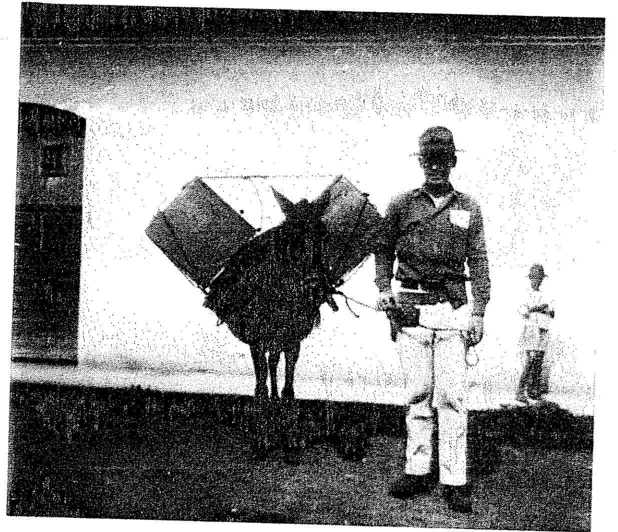
Discontent at home came less from press accounts than from the rising count of marines killed in Nicaragua, which invariably made the front pages. The *New York Times* carried a number of eloquent letters from their parents. Some expressed moral opposition to the war, like John S. Hemphill of St. Louis, Missouri, who condemned the "disgraceful war against this little nation. . . . What we are doing is no less than murder for the sole purpose of keeping in power a puppet president and acting as a collector for Wall Street." Others advanced an argument that became familiar in later years—the fear of the quagmire, of being nickel-and-dimed into an undeclared war. N. H. Dowdell of Carbondale, Illinois, wrote, "We ought to go down there and clean up that situation or get out of there and stay out. There's no use of sending a handful of our boys down there to get butchered. If it's war, let us call it that and successfully conclude it." The problem, however, was not a shortage of troops. It was that the six thousand marines in Nicaragua were not equipped to defeat a guerrilla force one-tenth as strong that was fighting on its own terrain. Nicaragua was the first place the United States encountered that particular dilemma.

The Marine Corps tried to placate its opponents by sending home a steady stream of reassuring propaganda images. While the foot-soldiers often recorded their resentment and demoralization in their diaries and letters home, official photographers recorded "Hi, Mom" shots of marines at play in a

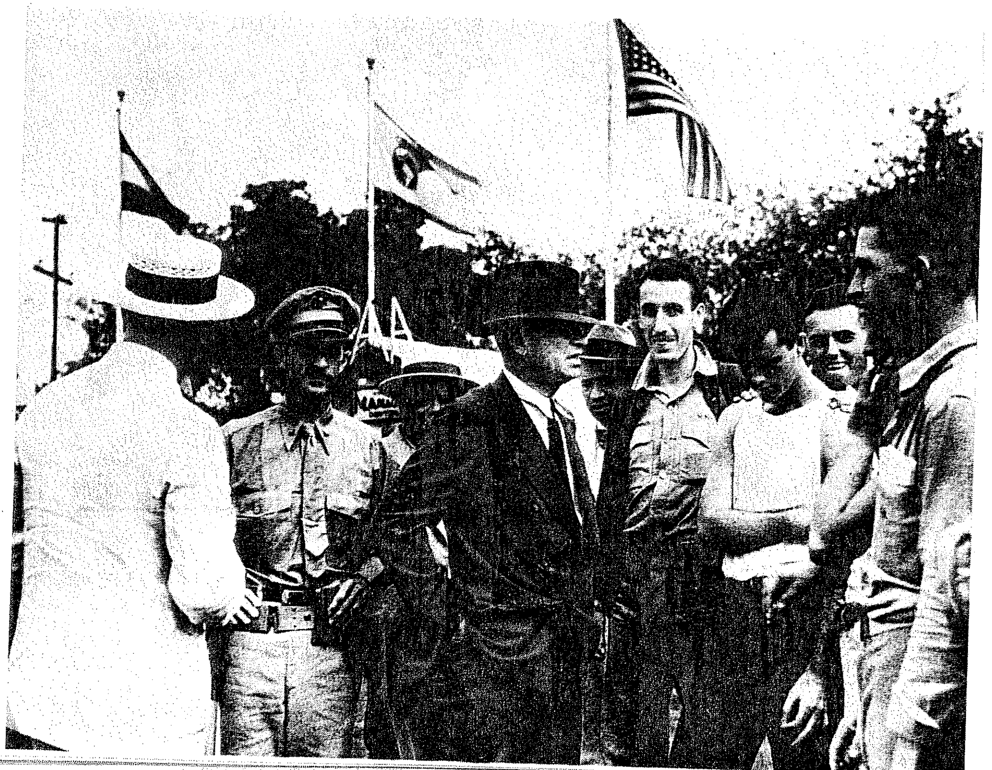
HEARTS AND MINDS. THE COVER OF THE *WASHINGTON POST* SHOWS WASHINGTON CROSSING THE DELAWARE.

tropical paradise: playing baseball, taking local children for rides in motorcycle sidecars, or, in posed shots, reading to them from their hometown newspapers. It was an imaginary world in which you could get a shoeshine with a cluster of tiny green parakeets perched on your shoulder, or spend a day off riding beneath an avenue of palm trees in a rustic pony trap.

The 1928 elections duly took place, with Brigadier General Frank R. McCoy acting as president of the Central Electoral Board, and an American, whether civilian or military, in charge of each polling place. The winner was José María Moncada, the Liberals' representative at the Tipitapa talks the previous year. But the war dragged on for four more years, and never became popular. Will Rogers paid a morale-boosting visit to the troops in 1932, but



"BALLOT BOXES TO BE USED IN THE NICARAGUAN ELECTION NOVEMBER 4 BEING TRANSPORTED ON MULES FROM MATAGALPA TO REMOTE PRECINCTS WHERE THERE ARE NO ROADS," 1928.



WILL ROGERS JOKES WITH ENLISTED MEN AT MANAGUA, NICARAGUA, OCTOBER 1932.

he showed little stomach for the war. Listening to the keynote speech by Senator Simeon D. Fess at the 1932 Republican Convention, Rogers commented sardonically: "He brought up Nicaragua, but he left our marines down there. He said that he would protect American lives down there, even if we had to send some there to protect." It was only in January 1933 that the last of the marines pulled out, leaving behind a grinding stalemate—and Sandino still in control of large stretches of the North.

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Nothing took the minds of Americans, or angry Latin Americans, off the war in Nicaragua more successfully than a spectacular flying tour of the region by Charles Lindbergh between December 1927 and February 1928, at the height of the controversy over Sandino. Lindbergh was the American hero of the hour. He had followed up his epic solo trans-Atlantic flight in May 1927 with a forty-eight-state cross-country tour of the United States, and in December he set off on a fourteen-country Pan-American journey in the *Spirit of St. Louis.* His final stop, and the climax of the tour, was Havana, where his arrival was timed to coincide with the Sixth Pan-American Conference, which was expected to be the scene of a stormy debate on U.S. policies in Mexico, Nicaragua, and the Caribbean.

"LINDBERGH ADDS NEW CHAPTER

TO HIS SAGA

PAN-AMERICAN GOOD-WILL TOUR

SIXTEEN COUNTRIES

9,390 MILES

THIRTEEN LATIN NATIONS

TWO AMERICAN TERRITORIES

ONE ENGLISH COLONY

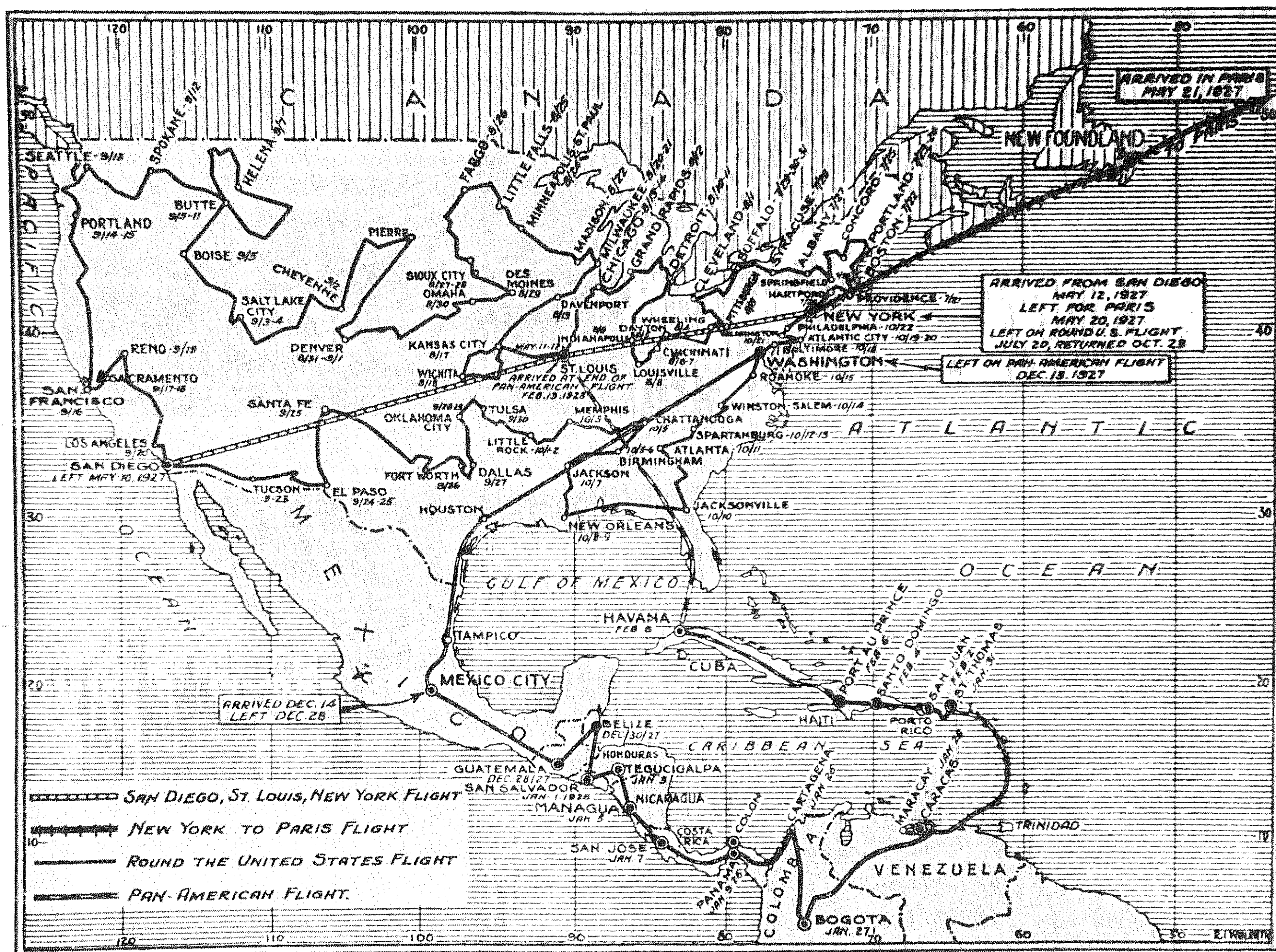
FLYING TIME

116 HOURS

30 MINUTES

DECEMBER 13, 1927, TO

FEBRUARY 13, 1928."



Lindbergh contracted to write the story of his flight exclusively for the *New York Times*, and did so, he informed his readers, while holding the plane steady with his other hand—a fitting image for "America's young Viking of the air." January 1928, with the marines fighting Sandino, the mythic figure of Lindbergh dominating the front pages, and U.S. diplomats under fire in Havana, was one of those rare moments in history when a series of dramatic firsts—in this case, military, technological, and journalistic—can, if skillfully orchestrated for public consumption, be made greater than the sum of its parts. The role of reporters and photographers in the Lindbergh episode, especially those from the *Times*, was crucial. The paper dispatched staff reporters by air, boat, railroad, and mule to each of Lindbergh's stops, in an effort that was unprecedented for foreign-news coverage in peacetime. Harold Denny, in fact, whose stories about Sandino were so influential, had not traveled to Managua to cover the war at all; he had gone there to cover Lindbergh, and stayed on.

In Mexico, Lindbergh's first stop, the flier's host was a new U.S. ambassador, Dwight Morrow. Morrow's appointment heralded a new sensitivity to Latin American relations that for the moment was called Good Will, and within five years, under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, would come to be known as the Good Neighbor Policy. The journalists' mood was apparent as soon as Lindbergh touched down, prompting the heaviest daily volume of wire copy ever filed from Latin America. Even in a less cynical age than our own, the headlines must have alerted the most casual reader to the press's willingness to help the Coolidge administration extract political mileage from

LATIN AMERICANS (AND WILL ROGERS AGAIN) GREET LINDBERGH. "LIKE THE SELF-RELIANT MAN OF EMERSON, HE 'STANDS IN THE ERECT POSITION, COMMANDS HIS LIMBS, WORKS MIRACLES.' . . . SOMETIMES A DEMOCRACY RUNS AFTER FALSE GODS, BUT WHEN THE AMERICAN PEOPLE MADE A HERO OF CHARLES A. LINDBERGH, THEY KNEW WHAT THEY WERE ABOUT." —*NEW YORK TIMES*, JANUARY 1928.

Lindbergh. "Country Forgets Its 'Crises' in Universal Acclaim for Messenger of Good Will," announced the *Times*. The young colonel, said the story, "seems destined to make men of alien race forget their differences in a common admiration of a splendid manhood."

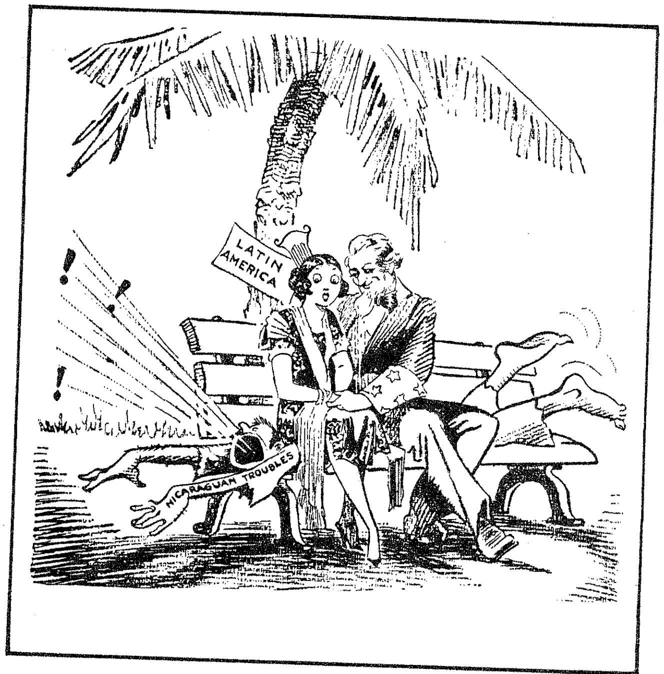
Carleton Beals, who was stringing for AP at the time, was on hand to cover Lindbergh's arrival in Mexico. The pilot touched down several hours late. As Ambassador Morrow hustled the colonel away for his exclusive interview with the *Times*, Beals, yelling to make himself heard above a crush of reporters, asked the reason for the delay. Lindbergh replied that he had become hopelessly lost: the railroad stations did not have their names painted on the roofs as they did back home, and, "Besides, I got my maps from the War Department in Washington, and they aren't any good." Beals used Lindbergh's comments as a colorful lead, only to learn later that his editors had killed the story. Elsewhere in Central America, Lindbergh was met by demonstrators and leaflets protesting U.S. policy in Nicaragua, which the press studiously ignored. The tone of press coverage was to be one of uninterrupted patriotic euphoria; in recent memory, the only parallels may be the coverage of the Bicentennial in 1976 or Liberty Weekend in 1986.

As Lindbergh moved south, the marines were working their way north, toward Sandino's base camp, engaged in their heaviest fighting since World War I. Marine commander Admiral David Foote Sellers warned of the dangers of flying low "over the part of Nicaragua infested by the bandit Sandino and his followers." Denny agreed about the risk, but doubted that Sandino would make Lindbergh a special target, since, "being an ignorant peon, it is possible that he has never heard of the flier or the *Spirit of St. Louis*." As it turned out, Lindbergh reached Managua without incident on January 5, and Denny greeted his arrival with enthusiasm. "Fiery Nicaragua saw a hero today such as it never dreamed could exist," he began. Lindbergh appeared as "a superman and a demigod to these warm-souled people of the Tropics."

Outspoken critics of the war, like Representative Huddleston of Alabama, saw the hypocrisy in this. "Our ambassador of peace wings his way through the air," Huddleston complained, "while our ambassadors of death struggle in the jungles of Nicaragua." But the *Times* front page saw no irony. Its left-hand lead read, "Lindbergh Honored as Envoy of Peace by Díaz Congress: Factions Forget Enmities." In the center of the page was Lindbergh's own daily dispatch, headlined, "Friendship for the United States Impresses Lindbergh." And in the right-hand column, the main news story: "Gen. Lejeune Going to Nicaragua with Marine Units." The Coolidge administration was taking advantage of public enthusiasm for Lindbergh to send in an additional thousand troops. There is also little doubt that the marines, making their own experiments with air power as the cutting edge of foreign policy, benefited from the romance of Lindbergh's conquest of the skies. Civilian air transport, too, was beginning to infatuate the U.S. public. Just three months earlier, in October 1927, Pan-American Airways had made its inaugural flight, the ninety-mile crossing from Key West, Florida, to Havana.

Although the Lindbergh flight was a popular piece of damage control, the January 1928 Pan-American Conference in Havana could hardly have been more poorly timed. Though the U.S. press tried to play the issue down, the violent search for Sandino brought to a head all the Latin Americans' festering resentment over marine occupations and landings in the Caribbean. Nor could the press, writing in an age before superpower summits, ignore the importance of the event. Coolidge's trip to Havana, only the fourth time a sitting president had traveled abroad, merely emphasized the sense of urgency. When he approached the podium to give his address, he faced a sullen gathering. Led by the delegate from El Salvador, the Latin American countries later resolved, "No state has a right to intervene in the internal affairs of another."

Coolidge's secretary of state, Charles Evans Hughes, fought hard to save the United States from diplomatic isolation, and succeeded in splitting the Latin American vote with a resolution of his own. Hughes insisted that the United States had a perfect right, "I will not say to intervene, but to interpose in a temporary manner to protect the lives and interests of its nationals." His trump card was the outspoken support of Cuba (the host) and both the Díaz and Moncada factions in Nicaragua (the supposed victim). The Cuban dictator, General Gerardo Machado, announced, "The Monroe Doctrine is, and ought to remain, the common defensive policy for the territorial integrity of America." Even at this late date, and with Machado in power (in Cuba



UNCLE SAM: "IT'S THE WIND, RUSTLING THE PALMS."
—JERRY DOYLE, *PHILADELPHIA RECORD*, 1927.

he was commonly known as *El Carnicero,* "the butcher"), Hughes was able to hold up U.S. conduct in Cuba as proof that its conduct in Nicaragua gave Latin Americans nothing to fear. By a happy coincidence, the thirtieth anniversary of the explosion of the *Maine* occurred during the conference, and at a memorial ceremony, Ambassador Harry P. Fletcher, a veteran of the Spanish-American War, vowed that the United States stood ready, "as she was here in Cuba in 1898, to champion and support the cause of democracy and freedom and independence in this hemisphere."

That view had few takers. Yet the U.S. press was much less interested in reporting Coolidge's isolation than in muting, ignoring, or discrediting the hostility of the international community. Taking the lead again, the *Times* suspected Russians from Mexico of "seeking to inject a Bolshevik virus into the proceedings of the conference." The newspaper surveyed European press comment, and although it found only one instance of praise—from the official Italian Fascist paper, *Tribuna,* which hailed the "majesty of utterances and breadth of vision shown by President Coolidge"—this was enough to earn the headline "Coolidge Views Approved." The stories again depicted Cuba as a land of American firsts, this time because Coolidge's Havana speech was the first foreign broadcast to be transmitted nationwide, over NBC.

When Lindbergh touched down in Havana, just as the row over intervention was reaching its climax, he swept the conference off the front pages altogether, to the satisfaction of the U.S. representatives. The delegates declared a recess in his honor, and Lindbergh spent the day treating Machado and the other asembled dignitaries to free joyrides over Havana. The conference migrated from the news section to the social pages, and a serious diplomatic embarrassment was turned into a celebration of the life-styles of the rich and famous. "The whole atmosphere of Havana suggests that the gala season is in full swing," wrote one *Times* reporter. "Gray gloves are easy to obtain, but [there is not] a pair of gray spats to be found in all Havana." The usual American colony of ten thousand had doubled, attracted by the horse races and "the appeal of a winter vacation in the balmy semi-tropical climate." The women's costumes were particularly noteworthy: for Coolidge's big speech, "The boxes, balconies, and floor were occupied by well-dressed people. American women there said that they had never seen in Europe or elsewhere a better-dressed assemblage of their own sex. They praised their Cuban sisters, who were present in large numbers, as having marked taste in costume and noted that the gowns for the most part were the latest Paris creations."

In fairness, not all the *Times*'s coverage of the region was so frivolous. Once the euphoria over Lindbergh had died down, some of the reporters who briefly stayed behind attempted a more thoughtful analysis of the issues that had dominated the conference. Clarence K. Streit, who had covered Lindbergh's two-day stopover in Haiti, wrote an unusually perceptive commentary that came to grips, like few reports of the time, with the feelings of the

local population. Perhaps more important, he understood that U.S. policies, however well-intentioned, had damaging long-term effects on the country's political life.

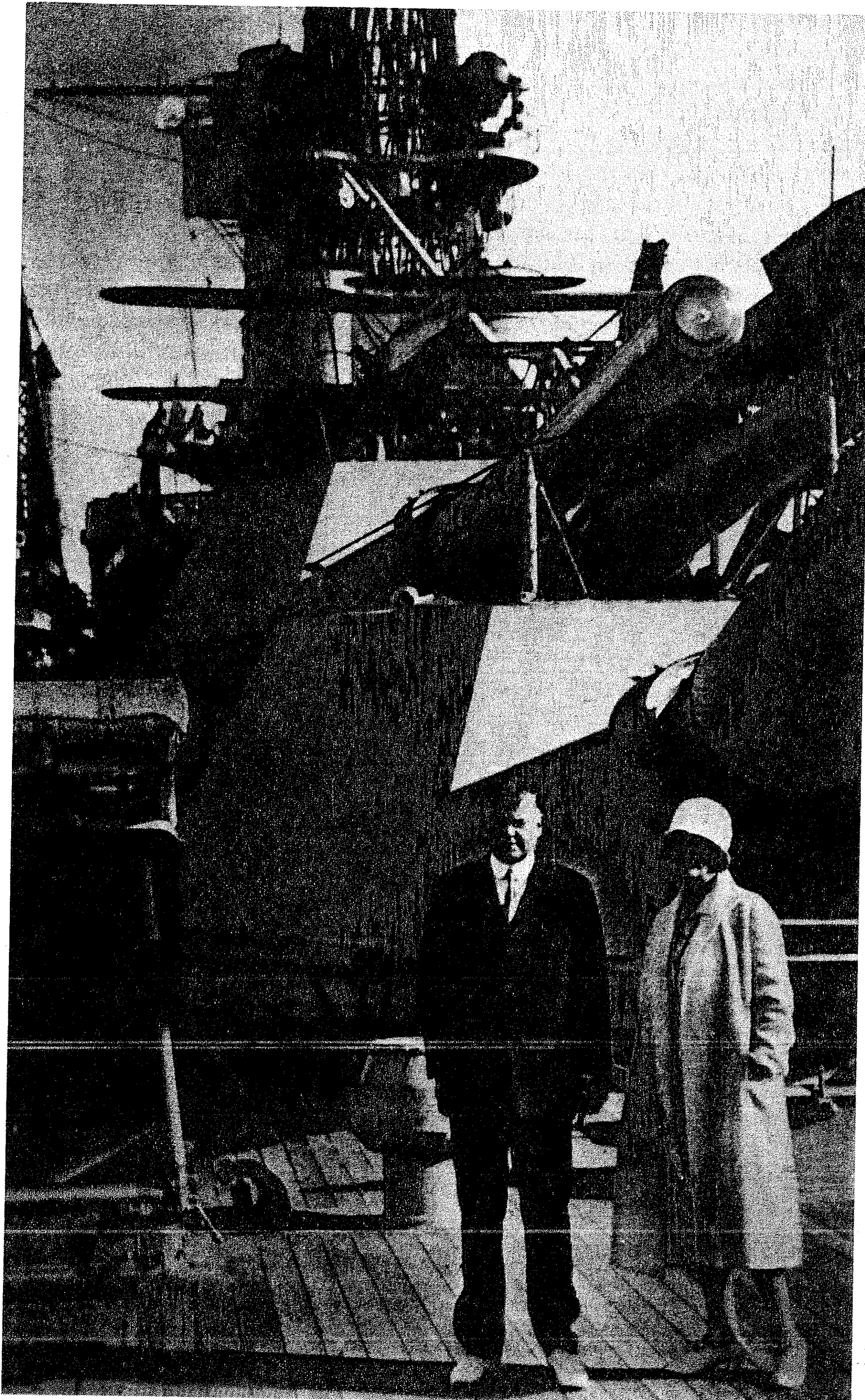
The accomplishments of the thirteen-year Marine occupation, Streit acknowledged, were "impressive and manifold . . . the establishment of order, sound finances, numerous public works, sanitation, rural farm schools . . . the appurtenances for stimulating productivity for which America is known." Why, then, should so many Latin Americans call us imperialists? The answer, Streit thought, was that, "finding everything in Haiti to be done, our advisers in Haiti plunged with characteristic American energy into the job of getting everything done as quickly as possible. With our national proneness to emphasize material accomplishments and speed, they have tended to neglect the human and political side of the Haitian problem. It is a system adapted more to speeding material work than to giving practice in self-government. It has the further disadvantage of hitching our chariot very close to that of one man, President Borno, whose policy of repressing opposition has especially inflamed sentiment against not only him but us."

There were signs, as the year went on, that some of these ideas might be filtering through to high places. In November, the Republican Herbert Hoover was elected president on a wave of national prosperity, and he immediately announced his desire to "get away from it all" by taking a seven-week "Good Will cruise" to Central and South America. Hoover's image was that of a technically competent, hands-on chief executive, a skilled engineer who had made his reputation in postwar European relief work and had traveled widely in Asia and Africa. His trip south signaled a readiness to improve U.S.–Latin American relations, continuing on the course begun by Dwight Morrow, Coolidge's envoy to Mexico.

But in the haste to turn over a new leaf, there was a characteristic desire to reaffirm American innocence and good intentions: the past had been a misunderstanding; the future would begin with a clean slate. In essence, it was the same message that Hughes had delivered to the Havana conference ten months earlier: Latin Americans had to understand that there was a difference between "intervening" and "interposing."

Hoover's message was relayed to the public by the large group of reporters and photographers who accompanied the president and his wife aboard the USS *Maryland*. Their dispatches made it apparent that they still viewed Central America through old, familiar lenses. As the *Maryland* approached the Nicaraguan port of Corinto, Richard J. Beamish of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* described the view from the ship's rails: "Central America, land of Richard Harding Davis romances, setting for many a tale of derring-do, of bucko and buccaneer, emerged like a stage set cut from cardboard with its volcanic, sharp-angled backdrop."

News reports from the vessel were effectively censored by George Barr Baker, a California newspaperman who had formerly been in charge of pub-



"DURING THEIR WEEKS OF LIVING WITH THE NATIVES, THE SOLDIERS OF THE SEA LEARNED THAT THE DEMARCATION POINT BETWEEN A LIBERAL AND A CONSERVATIVE BEGAN WITH BIRTH AND COULD END ONLY WITH DEATH—A BLOOD FEUD OF CENTURIES' STANDING."
—FROM THE OFFICIAL REPORT OF HOOVER'S GOODWILL TOUR.

licity for the Republican National Committee. "Nothing is accepted for transmission except after his 'OK,' " one reporter noted. "He is unwilling to have this appear as censorship in any form, but naturally nothing that Mr. Hoover could object to is sent out." Deference to the wishes of the president was an iron rule of reporting in 1928, and the stories from the ship were relentlessly upbeat. "That intervention is not now, never was, and never will be a set policy of the United States is one of the most important facts President-elect Hoover has made clear," wrote the man from the *Times*. "The result is that for the first time in a generation, Latin America really understands the attitude of the United States toward Nicaragua, Haiti, and Santo Domingo."

"VIVA HOOVER!" —FROM THE PRESIDENT'S STOPOVER IN SAN JOSÉ.

Large crowds were on hand to see Hoover wherever he stopped, as were posses of photographers to record every display of enthusiasm. Hoover's

speeches brimmed with optimism and Good Will and his distinctive philosophy of "American individualism." As he had asserted in his 1922 book of that title, the notion that men were equal "was part of the clap-trap of the French revolution." The answer was individualism, with its potential for injustice tempered by equality of opportunity. That was the key to the United States's success, and if Central Americans would mimic it, they could look forward to the same results.

Hoover was struck by the "encouraging" panorama of Nicaraguan politics in the wake of the U.S.-supervised 1928 elections, whose architect, Henry L. Stimson, would shortly be named secretary of state. As an engineer, Hoover was also interested in reviving talks about a Nicaraguan canal route, a proposal that was warmly endorsed by the newly elected president, José María Moncada, and his Conservative predecessor, Adolfo Díaz. Hoover also spelled out the direction of U.S. policy in the postelection period. Its centerpiece would be a phased withdrawal of the 5,500-strong Marine force, and the inauguration, on January 1, 1929, of a Nicaraguan military academy, staffed by U.S. officers, "modeled along the lines of West Point," to train a National Guard capable of policing the country even-handedly.

The Hoover tour helped to strengthen a definite though limited shift in attitudes toward Central America and the Caribbean that had already taken place among academic policy elites in the United States. According to conventional wisdom, wrote Raymond Leslie Buell, research director for the Foreign Policy Association, in 1930, the region was "semi-civilized." However, "A summer's journey through Central America had convinced me that this picture is distorted." The region was now governed by "presidents at least tolerably acceptable to articulate opinion," although of course, he added in a cautionary aside, "it should be remembered . . . that Central America is in the tropics and is inhabited by a population predominantly Indian."

But the flush lasted only nine months. October 1929 brought the Wall Street crash, and the president's name became forever associated with Hoovervilles, the squatter settlements of the jobless that blighted American cities during the Depression. Hoover never faced up to the domestic economic reasons for the crash, which he continued to blame on outside accidents—revolution in China, overproduction of cocoa in Ecuador. There was a similar fallacy in Hoover's view of the linkages between the U.S. economy and those of its neighbors. He had recommended that the region's leaders mimic the American system; they had done so eagerly, but the outcome was neither stable democracy nor any noticeable improvement in living standards. To make matters worse, when the U.S. economy failed, the real linkages were all too clear. After 1929, the effects of the Depression ripped through the marginal, unprotected economies of Central America and the Caribbean with devastating results. No countries suffered more than El Salvador, where the collapse of coffee prices on the world market sparked a revolt in 1932, in which the government killed thousands, and Cuba, whose economy was hostage to the price of sugar.