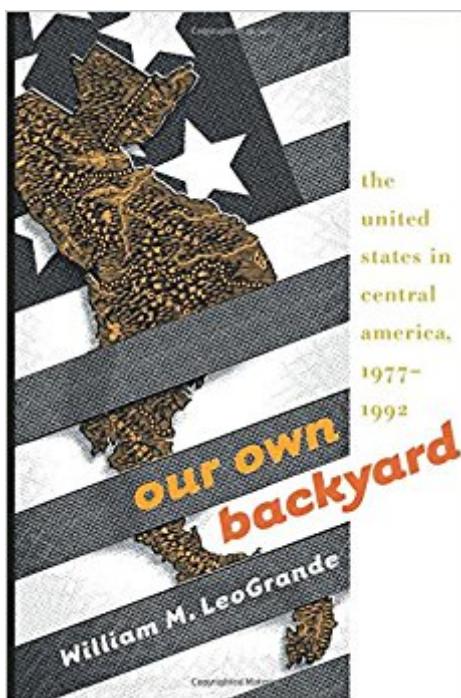


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# Our Own Backyard: The United States In Central America, 1977-1992



## **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.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

"What began as a relatively bounded project examining the domestic debate over Central America evolved into a comprehensive history of U.S. policy toward the region during its decade of crisis--how policy was made, how it worked, and how the administration tried to sell it to the American people." According to William LeoGrande, American involvement in Central America in the 1970s and '80s can be understood only in the context of the Cold War, and its greater struggle against the Soviet Union. Central America--and by this William LeoGrande means mainly El

Salvador and Nicaragua--was simply one of several stages upon which these political war games were played. This was especially true during the Reagan years, during which U.S. policy "shifted from Carter's attempts to seek a negotiated settlement in El Salvador, and coexistence with the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, to Reagan's effort to achieve military victory for the Salvadoran government, and the ouster of the Sandinistas by covert proxy war." In *Our Own Backyard*, LeoGrande traces the evolution of American policy in Central America as well as its reception by the Congress and people of the United States. He discusses the schisms within Reagan's own ranks, the struggle between the Republican White House and the Democratic congress, and how the ever-present shadow of Vietnam continued to shape American attitudes well into the 1990s. This is a book that liberals will love and conservatives will find plenty to disagree with. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This important exposé documents the full extent of the Reagan administration's lies, deceptions, subterfuges and cover-ups in waging a covert war against Nicaragua's Sandinistas and in supporting El Salvador's right-wing oligarchy in its war against leftist guerrillas. While the Iran-Contra hearing would reveal how Reagan's White House aides diverted profits from arms sales to support the CIA-backed contra army, LeoGrande, an American University government professor who worked on congressional Democratic committees that helped shape U.S. Central American policy in the mid-'80s, digs deeper, drawing hundreds of his own interviews with members of Congress, Reagan and Bush staffers and Central American officials. He argues convincingly that Reagan hardliners—notably Jeane Kirkpatrick, William Casey, Edwin Meese, William Clark—wrested day-to-day control of Central American policy away from the State Department. Ideologically committed (as was Reagan) to purging the national psyche of the "Vietnam syndrome" by means of a quick, decisive victory over communism in Central America, these hardliners worked to circumvent congressional restraints and derail dialogue with the Sandinistas. LeoGrande credits pragmatic President Bush with encouraging the diplomatic process that led to the Sandinistas' electoral defeat in 1990 and acerbically points out that the negotiated settlement that ended El Salvador's civil war in 1992 was strikingly similar to a peace proposal made by Salvadorean guerrillas 11 years earlier. Full of unorthodox, original perspectives, LeoGrande's clearly written, magisterial study holds timely post-Cold War lessons that transcend the Central American setting. Editor, Elaine Maisner; UNC foreign rights contact, Vicky Wells. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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.

Le Grande has used mostly open source material to put together an account of our policy in Central America during the 1970's. He strings together open source accounts to give a picture of our support to the Salvadoran Armed forces and to the Contras in their fight against the Sandinistas. The predominant theme in both cases is the struggle of President Reagan to obtain the funds to carry out his policies. On the whole this is a useful book but it should be read with others such as that by Todd Greenwood for another perspective on the policies.

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.

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.

Excellent book. LeoGrande tells us a disturbing tale that would be fodder for nightmares. And it's all too true. That these people were once in charge of our government, and today are not sitting in jail is appalling.

Mr. LeoGrande has written a 590 page book with an additional 182 pages of notes and index. Only a university with a great basketball program such as UNC (the publisher) could afford to humor such a person. On the book cover, it states Mr. LeoGrande is an employee of "American University" yet doesn't bother to inform me about this school. Is it well-known like Harvard or MIT? At any rate he knows how to go on and on about his chosen subject.

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