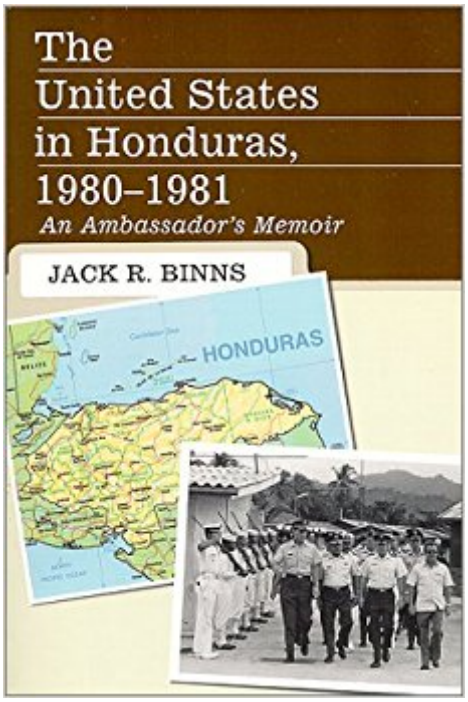
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The United States In Honduras, 1980-1981: An Ambassador's Memoir



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Synopsis

As former ambassador to Honduras during a pivotal period in both the Carter and Reagan administrations, Jack R. Binns offers a unique perspective, in diary format, on the period from 1980 through 1981.

Book Information

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"valuable...highly useful"--American Committees on Foreig

Retired from the Foreign Service, Jack R. Binns lives in Tucson, Arizona. His articles have appeared in such publications as The Arizona Daily Star and Foreign Service Journal.

At the time that Jack Binns and I served as ambassadors, he to Honduras, I to El Salvador, revolution was sweeping over Central America. Although many in the Reagan foreign policy team knew better, it was the official position of the administration that these revolutions were not home grown but manufactured by the Soviet Union and Cuba. Binns pulls no punches in this lively, authoritative account of how a professional diplomat carrying out his instructions to calm trouble spots and strengthen democracy came into conflict with zealots who knew that their policy could not stand the light of truth. They pushed Binns not to report the facts about the corruption and abuses of the Honduran military. Binns stood up to these dishonorable and illegal pressures at the cost of his career. To those who follow Central America, this is an indispensable tool to understand how, within a few short years, the pleasant, easy-going country of Honduras was turned into a staging area for

the Nicaraguan contras and the place where a CIA-backed secret battalion tortured and killed political dissidents. Never in the history of Latin America has a group of countries suffered such concentrated death and destruction as the United States, through its proxy armies inflicted on Central America during the 1980s. Read this book to find out how Washington officials refused to listen to sound recommendations that could have saved us a war.

This is an interesting ,informative and very readable book. In 1980, I diligently read various newspaper and news magazine articles trying to keep up with the situation in Central America. The more I read, the more confused I became.It was very difficult obtaining a clear picture of the true hapoenings in that part of the world. At that time I found that separating fact from propaganda and columnist personal bias was impossible. After reading Ambassador Jack Binns' book, a clear and concise picture of the situation has emerged. I found the book enlightening and troubling. The enlightening part was that I was now able to see and understand the entire situation in a clear chronological order. All occurrences that I read in the book now made sense and enabled me to separate the the facts from propaganda and personal opinion that I read at the time. The troubling part was the lies, inaccuracies and bias reporting as well as the misinformation that our government was putting out. I wish there was a Jack Binns type book to cover all the United States foreign policy situations. This type of book is the best way to create a well-informed citizenry that will be able to vote in an intelligent manner instead of emotionally based on misinformation or personal bias.

Lacking any prior interest in Central America, I resolved to read this book because the author has been a friend since our days together as junior naval officers in the late 1950s. My persistence was rewarded as I found myself increasingly involved in momentous events on the world stage, with my old wardroom colleague, Jack Binns, calling the shots. The author and his family were literally under fire in a war zone, with him at one point simultaneously trying to stop a war and a coup - and succeeding in both endeavors. My guess is that a number of generals and politicians at one time or another contemplated the pros and cons of having him rubbed out. I suppose one of the toughest challenges for him was having to deal with people like Colonel Alvarez, who obviously directed the human rights transgressions in Honduras as head of Public Security Force - and at the same time was responsible for safeguarding U. S. property and lives.I savored some of the book's descriptive touches, be it the characterization of presidential adviser Torres Arias with his gold Rolex watch and heavy gold chains or CIA operative Dewey Clarridge looking like a fugitive from La Dolce Vita - or the way the author sets the scene with the fly-specked map in the base commander's office in

Puerto Lempira. Binns's observations prompted by the abrupt dismissal of his loyal Foreign Service superior, Assistant Secretary Bowdler, by the incoming Reagan administration were elegant and moving. And I was impressed by how Binns responded in his capacity as our ambassador in Honduras to businessman Fernando Lardizabal's plea to postpone elections, and the way he challenged Secretary of State Haig's personal emissary, Vernon Walters, on human rights abuses in the region.While this memoir was not written for general readership, The United States in Honduras, 1980 - 1981 certainly offers a compelling first-hand account of a critical period in a critical area - and thus provides invaluable documentation for the future. It is also an informative read for anyone who wants to know how our embassies operate in pursuit of our national goals, real and perceived. I would suggest that this book be required reading not only for anyone contemplating a career in the Foreign Service, but also for political appointees to ambassadorial posts. The former would get a comprehensive preview of their duties, while the latter would perhaps gain more of an appreciation of their Foreign Service staff.

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