

Librería
Bonilla y Asociados
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Título: Blood Of Brothers. Life And War In Nicaragua

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Precio: \$275.00

Editorial:

Año: 2007

Tema:

Edición: 1ª

Sinopsis

ISBN: 9780674025936

Kinzer served in Central America first in the 1970s as a freelance journalist and later as a New York Times bureau chief in Managua (1983-89). An eyewitness to events, he interviewed members of the Somoza, Sandinista, and contra hierarchies. As a result, he provides a highly objective and balanced assessment of events that led to the fall of the Somoza government in 1979. Kinzer avoids ideological bias, but he does note that the Sandinistas came to power because "those most likely to shed blood are the most likely to triumph." Yet despite their many shortcomings, he concludes "the Sandinistas at least provided a basis upon which a genuine democracy could be built." An example of public affairs journalism at its best, his book will stand as the definitive study of Nicaragua in the turbulent 1980s.