This selection of pictures was made by Frank Gentile on the occasion of his participation in the TV program *Now with Bill Moyers*, ECHOES OF WAR, April 25, 2003.
Fire. We are always fascinated by fire. During my years of work for NEWSWEEK Magazine, I learned that pictures showing fire, no matter what the story, had a greater chance of being published than did others. This picture shows a young boy with a machete in front of a burning field of sugar cane. For me the flames symbolize the intensity of Nicaragua during the 1980s, a country set afire by politics, war, life and death.
Nicaragua is known as a land of volcanoes and lakes. During the process of making this book, I searched for an image to say that. This is what I found. The fact that a young girl is laboring to wash her clothes in Lake Managua adds to that message.
I did not want this book to be a "war" book. I wanted to go deeper. I wanted to explain Nicaragua as a land rich in resources, in people, in spirit. This picture of the man drying coffee beans in the sun explains part of what Nicaragua is about. Unfortunately, Nicaragua is also a land disrupted by war and stained with the blood of its finest sons and daughters.
Politics has been a very disruptive force in the history of this nation. This image of the 1984 presidential campaign by Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega is part of that history.
The Sandinista Children's Association was one of the many organizations that the Sandinista government established to support itself and its programs. The Sandinistas' tendency to categorize Nicaraguan society into "for us" or "against us" factions is one of the reasons why they lost significant popular support.
This image, and the image facing it in my book, are the two faces of the Nicaraguan conflict. This man, one of the subjects I pursued for the current television piece, is an anti-Sandinista rebel, or Contra.
Facing him on the opposite page of the book is a member of the Simon Bolivar Battalion, the most renowned of the Sandinista Peoples' Army. Separated by ideology, they are sons of the same country, the same history, the same heritage. But at this point in time, each fought to kill the other.
This woman lost a relative killed by a Contra land mine. Like so many other victims of this war, the woman’s relative was a civilian. During the Contra War, international human rights organizations accused the Contras of grave and consistent human rights violations.
This Soviet-built helicopter is unloading Sandinista troops in Nicaragua’s northern province of Jinotega.
These young Sandinista soldiers were ambushed by U.S.-backed Contras in the northern province of Matagalpa. The young man on the far left, an army medic, is one of the characters I included in the current television piece for NOW WITH BILL MOYERS. He currently drives a bus in Managua.
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This is one of the last pictures in the book. The young Sandinista soldier clearly is exhausted. We had been on patrol for many long days and nights. His hat sags over his head. His eyes focus a thousand miles away. But there is hope here, as he sniffs the white flower he holds for a taste of life.
Almost 20 years after covering the conflict between Sandinistas and Contras for Newsweek, photographer Bill Gentile returns to Nicaragua to revisit the subjects of those photos.

Bill Gentile is a photojournalist who teaches at Kent State in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication. In recent years he’s been working on a series of documentaries that trace how single commodities — production, trade and use — can weave together people and cultures around the world. We last talked to him about his background and his work in Cuba for Distant Neighbors.

Now, Bill Gentile narrates our new photo essay about his return to Nicaragua.*

CAN YOU GIVE US A BIT OF BACKGROUND ON YOUR CURRENT STORY FOR OUR PROGRAM?
In 1987, members of the Canadian documentary production company White Pine Pictures came to Nicaragua to make a film on the newsgathering process. I was one of the journalists featured in the film, which turned out to be very successful. Called THE WORLD IS WATCHING, it has become somewhat of a classic in its field, broadcast in dozens of countries, translated into a number of languages. Last year, the same documentary makers approached me about a sequel and I suggested that my role be my return to Nicaragua in search of some of the subjects of my 1989 book, NICARAGUA. Now a documentary filmmaker myself, I felt that an examination of these Nicaraguans’ lives since the time I made their still pictures for my book would tell the larger story of Nicaragua, the nation. So I pitched the idea to NOW, and it all fell into place. This explains why, in my story for Bill Moyers about the subjects in my book, you see footage of me interviewing these subjects. This footage comes from White Pine and what will soon be part of the sequel to the 1987 film.

WHAT, THEN, IS THE CONDITION OF NICARAGUA?
Not good. After years of revolution, counter-revolution and now "democratic" rule, Nicaragua is one of the poorest countries in the entire hemisphere. The gap between the "haves" and "have nots" is deeper and wider than I've ever seen. The civilian rulers have failed to provide a better life for the majority. The struggle for survival, for even the basic necessities of life, is more dramatic than ever.

AND NOW, AS YOU'VE RETURNED TO NICARAGUA, DO YOU FIND THAT THE DIVISIONS BETWEEN THE "SANDINISTA" AND "CONTRA" FACTIONS STILL RUN DEEP?
No. And this was the most fascinating part of my trip. Everywhere I went, people told me about how the two sides that fought so bitterly against each other during the '70s and '80s were moving beyond those divisions. Most wanted simply to forget the past and to move on with their lives. But some, and here's the fascinating part, some said they are working toward a new era of what they called "convergence." They defined convergence as a coming together of those who struggled the hardest and lost the most during those difficult years, the peasants, the workers, the poor, to work toward a common goal. And that goal is to demand
and to attain better living conditions and a more dignified life, and to not be manipulated by a powerful minority.

**WHAT IS YOUR FEELING ABOUT NICARAGUA TODAY AND ITS FUTURE?**
Especially after having witnessed so much bloodshed and so much suffering since 1979, I'm saddened by what I see today. But now that the Cold War is over and Nicaraguans can determine their own destiny with less outside interference, I'm confident that they can work it out among themselves. At least they have a chance now. Twenty years ago they didn't even have a decent chance.

**DO YOU FIND IMAGES ESSENTIAL TO TELLING A STORY? AND SPECIFICALLY IMAGES OF DEATH AND FEAR — CAN THEY CONVEY THE HORROR OF WAR?**
War is truly understandable only by those who actually have seen it. Heard it. Smelled it. Tasted it. Felt it. Cowered beneath it. Relished it. Survived it. Dreamt it. Overcome it. Longed for it. Walked away from it. No amount of powerful storytelling and imagery can convey the fear, the fascination, the horror, the true knowledge of war to the deepest, darkest and perhaps dirtiest recesses of one's being where this knowledge resides exclusively in people who have actually experienced war. And I tell you this as a non-combatant. Those who actually have fought in war constitute a fraternity whose experience is unknowable even to those of us who have witnessed it. Having said this, words and images are the only tools we have to try and convey even a superficial knowledge of what people killing people is really about.

I think some of the images generated during the conflict were terrific. But I think too many of the mainstream media declined to use them. Now, more than ever, our nation needs solid, balanced reporting and imagery, to provide a solid, balanced sense of the world we live in, especially after 9/11. I think it is a gross disservice to the American people to provide them with a one-sided view of the world. It is precisely because we are perceived as unknowing and uncaring that some of our policies have been met with so much resistance by traditional friends overseas.

**YOU ARE A FILMMAKER, PHOTOGRAPHER AND JOURNALIST. WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU BRING THAT’S UNIQUE TO TELLING THE STORY OF WAR?**
Experience. Perspective. Compassion. I've seen enough of war to understand and to convey the meaning of it, the folly and the failure of it. But I'm not intoxicated or addicted by it. I'm not numbed by it. And please don't get the impression that I bill myself as a "war photographer," because I don't, even though I've covered a number of conflicts from Central America to the Persian Gulf. One of the most astute photo editors I ever had the pleasure to work with told me once that: "You're not about death. You're about life." And she was right.

*THE IMAGES IN THE PHOTOS ESSAY HAVE BEEN CULLED FROM BILL GENTILE’S BOOK, NICARAGUA, PUBLISHED BY W.W. NORTON & COMPANY IN 1989.*
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