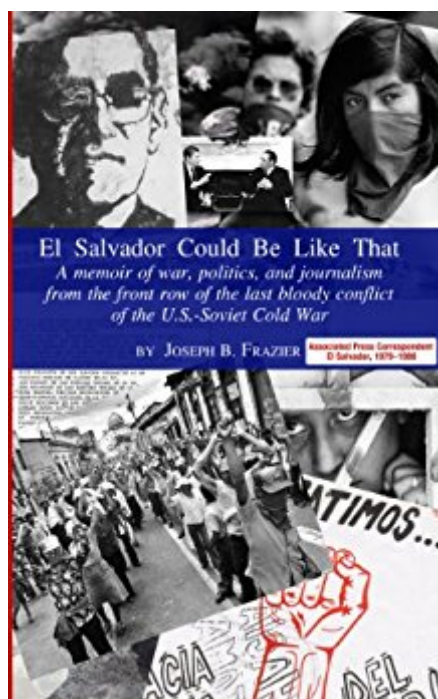


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El Salvador Could Be Like That: A Memoir Of War And Journalism



Synopsis

This book is dedicated to the reporters, photographers, and journalists I worked with as we tried to make sense out of the tragic times that came to define much of Central America, especially tiny, bludgeoned El Salvador in the 1980s. The wars that brought us together are forgotten now. So are the lessons they should have taught us. This book is a reminder of both. Peeling away academia and officialdom from the conflict in El Salvador, presenting it as it fell on the backs of the Salvadoran people, the ones who somehow never really mattered in many official eyes, from whatever country those official eyes might have peered. These are snapshots of the underbelly of a largely forgotten war that has wound up on the scrapheap with equally forgotten conflicts. It is a groundâ€™s eye view of that war and of what it did to the peasants, the soldiers, the school kids and union leaders, the shopkeepers, the fishermen and artisans, the parish priests, the everyday, unremarkable people who often wound up in unmarked graves, and also on the edit room floor.

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Customer Reviews

Precious few books and memoirs have been written about the events that unfolded in Central

America in the 1980s. A full-blown civil war was underway in El Salvador and, just across the Gulf of Fonseca in neighboring Nicaragua, the U.S. was supporting a proxy war against the leftist Sandinista government. For an entire generation of journalists who had grown up watching images of the Vietnam War on the nightly news, Central America seemed to offer a similar promise of the Big Story -- the twisted imperatives of empire trumping concerns for human rights amid the clatter of helicopters and the snap of bullets on a jungle landscape. It seemed to many that El Salvador would go the way of Vietnam, with U.S. involvement escalating from initial training by mobile Special Forces teams to an eventual direct intervention to prop up a corrupt, brutal and seemingly intransigent regime incapable of reform. But the reforms did come, albeit slowly and not always prettily, alongside a sophisticated post-Vietnam counterinsurgency campaign. The U.S. never did intervene directly, and El Salvador eventually slid out of the headlines as the war neared its end in the early 1990s. Few people born after the mid-1980s even know that the U.S. was heavily invested in two proxy wars -- in El Salvador and Nicaragua -- in the 1980s that ultimately left tens of thousands dead and produced hundreds of thousands of refugees, many of whom ended up in the U.S. Joe Frazier, who covered El Salvador and Central America for the Associated Press in the first half of the 1980s, seeks to rectify this collective amnesia with his book, "El Salvador Could Be Like That." It is a welcome effort and a welcome addition to the literature of war reportage. El Salvador was the caldron where the careers of many reporters were forged.

You didn't have to have been there. Joe Frazier helps you "get it" about El Salvador and that small Central American nation's Via Crucis of a long, externally manipulated civil war by providing an account that is both deeply felt and rigorously observed. As a reporter, yes, of which he was one of the most-engaged in covering the last-gasp Cold War conflicts up and down the isthmus for more than a decade. But also as a former soldier (Vietnam Marine), a husband who lost his wife to the regional conflagration and, perhaps most importantly, as possessor of one of the best bulls***-detecting antennas in the business of foreign correspondence. The main reason this is such a good and illuminating read about "the Tom Thumb of the Americas" during its horrible and heroic revolutionary era is because Frazier really cared. Not about which camp was going to come away with the geopolitical prize, but about the country folk and city folk, the shopkeepers and dirt farmers and bus drivers and coffee pickers and shine boys and pupusa flippers whose sons and brothers (sisters, too, in the case of the rebel army) were killing and getting killed along the road leading from a quasi-feudal repressive system of economy and politics to an approximation of democratic modernity. It's a great story, one that's founded on the idiosyncratic verve and vitality of

Salvadorans themselves. There's abundant discussion as to why los Guanacos are so inimitably like they are. Maybe their industriousness and stoicism and good humor and resilience derive from being jammed into the smallest nation of the continental Americas, the overcrowded condition giving rise to a cogent particular mix of competition and cooperation.

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