

balanced, albeit sympathetic, perspective.

*El escritor Hindu* traveled in Nicaragua for three weeks in July 1986 as a guest of the Sandinistas. He describes his book as a "portrait of the moment . . . but, I believe, a crucial and revealing one." The International Court of Justice had just ruled in June against the legality of U.S. aid to the *contras*; President Daniel Ortega had recently closed the liberal newspaper *La Prensa*.

In a series of brief, tightly constructed chapters, Rushdie locates the contradictions of this "martyr country," where, he notes, "to understand the living . . . it was necessary to begin with the dead." As a writer, he found Sandinista censorship to be one of the most unpalatable contradictions. Although the president and the minister of culture are poets, and the vice president is a novelist, this "government of writers had turned into a government of censors."

The government is also notorious for its mistreatment of the Miskito Indians, who inhabit the vast Atlantic coast province of Zelaya. Rushdie found that, while the charges were largely true, Managua's scheme to grant limited autonomy to the region has already lessened local resentment. Ultimately, the Sandinistas win Rushdie's cautious endorsement for resolving the nation's most glaring contradiction: During the 46-year reign of the Somozas, most Nicaraguans lived like exiles in their own country. The revolution is thus "an act of migration," an ongoing process in which Nicaraguans are struggling to "invent their country, and, more than that, themselves."

**A CONFLICT OF VISIONS:  
Ideological Origins of  
Political Struggles**  
by Thomas Sowell  
Morrow, 1987  
273 pp. \$15.95

"Conflicts of interests dominate the short run, but conflicts of visions dominate history." Hence the need, argues Sowell, a Hoover Institution economist, for every generation to rethink the age-old controversy about the nature of man.

Visions—what "we sense or feel *before* we have constructed . . . a theory"—tend toward two extremes: At one end, notes Sowell, are those who share a "constrained" vision of man as inherently limited; at the other, those who see human potential as unlimited. The former, including thinkers such as Adam Smith, Edmund Burke, and Milton Friedman, believe that society must guard man against his own shortcomings. The latter—



Jean Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Paine, and John Kenneth Galbraith, among others—hold that society must be structured so as to encourage the individual's fullest development.

Readers familiar with Sowell's work will not be surprised that he tends to favor the constrained vision. He marshals support for his "gut feeling" from history as well as from philosophy. The triumph of the unconstrained vision, as during the latter stages of the French Revolution, often leads to "surrogate decision-making," whereby the "enlightened few" end up making choices for the good of the "benighted masses."

Advocates of the constrained vision trust in processes and restriction on power more than in man's intentions: Peaceful nations must be militarily strong to be secure; judges must apply rules rather than prescribe social conditions; economies must evolve independently. Unconstrained thinkers seek to influence the course of events through judicial activism (the Warren Court), manipulation of the economy (New Deal policies), or compensation for particular groups (affirmative action).

Sowell's instructive presentation allows for complexities, including the "hybrid visions" of thinkers such as Karl Marx and John Stuart Mill. Marx, says Sowell, "spoke of 'the greatness and temporary necessity for the bourgeois regime'—a notion foreign to socialists with the unconstrained vision, for whom capitalism was simply immoral."

**WITNESS TO A CENTURY:  
Encounters with the Noted,  
the Notorious, and  
Three S.O.B.s**

by George Seldes  
Ballantine, 1987  
544 pp. \$19.95

All centuries have their wars, catastrophes, and heroes, but none has been as painstakingly documented as the 20th. Perhaps one of its most peripatetic witnesses, and certainly one of its longest-lived, is reporter George Seldes, now 96, who took his first job with the *Pittsburgh Leader* in 1909 and quickly plunged into the main events of his day. He covered the battles of World War I, Russia shortly after the revolution, the Spanish Civil War, and the rise of Hitler and Mussolini, corresponded with J. Edgar Hoover, and became an admirer of Tito. His memories range from presidents to buffoons. Among the latter was the bombastic Mussolini: "I am a fatalist," he told Seldes in 1924. "I believe in the star of destiny. . . I am not afraid of death." While a special student at Harvard in 1912, Seldes came to know John Reed as a "ribald minnesinger" and was sur-