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**edited by alexander cockburn and jeffrey st.clair**

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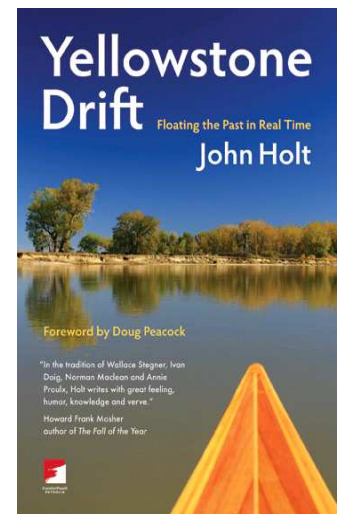
### *The Coup Apologist*

## Meet Jim Demint

By NIKOLAS KOZLOFF

President Obama has decried it. The Organization of American States and countries throughout Latin America have condemned it. The European Union has protested loudly. The majority of world leaders have raised their voices in opposition, confirmed by a resolution just passed in the United Nations General Assembly. And yet, one prominent legislator on Capitol Hill has leapt to the defense of the new coup regime which took power in Honduras on Sunday. That politician is Republican South Carolina Senator Jim Demint.

Honduran President Manuel Zelaya was deposed by the military just as he was seeking a non-binding referendum which the Honduran Congress and courts pronounced illegal. Zelaya's move was seen as an effort to alter the constitution so he could seek a second term. Honduras' Supreme Court said Zelaya's referendum violated the constitution, a decision which the military has used as a justification for overthrowing the government. The White House however is not buying these justifications, saying that it's the



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military which has behaved unconstitutionally. "Concerns or doubts about the wisdom of his [Zelaya's] actions relating to his proposed non-binding referendum are independent of the unconstitutional act taken against him," an administration official stated.

If you're still having some doubts about whether what happened in Honduras constituted a coup, consider the following: the military invaded Zelaya's home, kidnapped the President and forced him to leave the country. The military then installed an unelected President without due process or adherence to the Honduran Constitution. On Wednesday Honduras' new government, spearheaded by former head of Congress Roberto Micheletti, established a nighttime curfew, suspended personal liberties and freedom of assembly, declared the right to detain suspects for more than 24 hours, and restricted freedom of movement both inside Honduras as well as in and out of the country. Thousands have protested the new government in Tegucigalpa and union leaders have announced a national strike.

Audaciously taking on Obama, Demint chastised the White House for what he called "a slap in the face to the people" of Honduras. "The people of Honduras have struggled too long to have their hard-won democracy stolen from them by a Chávez-style dictator," Demint remarked. The South Carolinian, who is a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, went even further, attacking the Organization of American States for "trampling" over the hopes and dreams of a "free and democratic people."

It's hardly surprising that Demint would come out for the military takeover in Honduras given that he's been a long time booster of Central American free trade. In this sense, he shares the ideological views of newly installed Honduran President Roberto Micheletti, a former businessman and conservative politician who has supported the trade initiative. In recent years Micheletti had criticized Zelaya for moving Honduras into the Bolivarian Alternative of the Americas, known by its Spanish acronym ALBA, a socially progressive trade pact backed by Hugo Chávez of Venezuela seeking to counteract U.S.-style corporate free trade. The regional trade group includes Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, Bolivia and Dominica. Since its founding in 2004, ALBA has promoted joint factories and banks, an emergency food fund, and exchanges of cheap Venezuelan oil for food, housing, and educational investment.

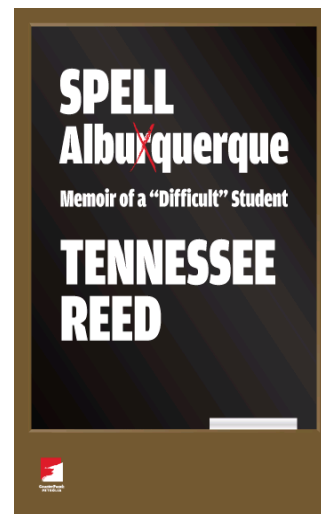
Demint has long been on the other side of the fence from the likes of Zelaya and Chávez. First elected to the House in 1998, he has been an eager promoter of far right wing economic orthodoxy like privatizing social security and abolishing the federal minimum wage. His small town, rural Piedmont district was traditionally dominated by non-union textile mills but more recently had been transformed by the arrival of foreign manufacturing investment which was lured to the area through cheap labor.

In 2003, Demint opted to run for Senate when Democrat Fritz Hollings retired. Placing a big political bet, he vocally supported the Central American free trade agreement which had been opposed by South Carolina textile executives. One of five Republican contenders in the Senatorial primary, Demint sought to establish his credentials as a true believer in free trade, a somewhat risky proposition predicated on the notion that the textile industry was washed up and new economic players tied to free trade would now be calling the shots statewide.

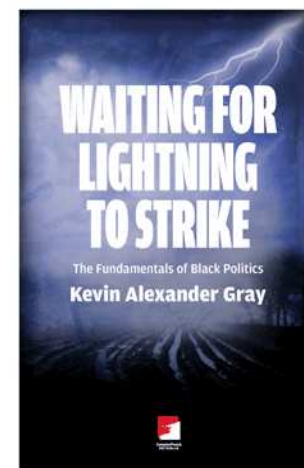
The Central American free trade agreement, Demint argued, would create manufacturing jobs in South Carolina while helping to expand overseas markets for some of South Carolina's new economic players like BMW. But Lloyd Wood of the American Manufacturing Trade Action Coalition said that the agreement would throw thousands of South Carolinians out of work. In an editorial entitled "Demint's World More Like Fantasy Island," South Carolina's largest newspaper *The State* slammed the Senate hopeful: "Unfair trade agreements like NAFTA have cost South Carolina tens of thousands of jobs. Now the new Central American Free Trade Agreement threatens to do even more damage."

In the Republican primary, Demint came out in second place and faced former Governor David Beasley in a runoff. "This campaign is going to be all about jobs and unfair trade," said Beasley, a born again opponent of

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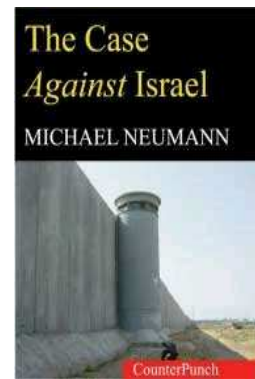
wide open international trade. Originally a free trade booster himself, Beasley was voted out of office in 1998. After that, thousands of South Carolinians also lost their jobs in a recession.

In a television ad, Beasley featured a middle aged man who had been laid off after the worker's manufacturing company moved jobs overseas. Demint for his part refused to back down from his free trade advocacy, winning applause from the likes of the right wing Cato Institute and Club for Growth. Demint beat Beasley handily after capitalizing on the former governor's negative image.

In the general election, Demint faced off against Democrat and State Education Superintendent Inez Tenenbaum who also took a more protectionist stand on trade. The textile industry donated \$100,000 to Tenenbaum's campaign and an industry lobbying group put up billboards across the state reading "Lost Your Job to 'Free Trade' and Offshoring Yet? Register. Vote." In the end however the state's strong support for Bush in the election helped to push Demint over the top. Heading to the Senate, Demint later voted for the Central American Free Trade agreement in 2005, helping to secure passage of the initiative.

Over the past five years Demint has promoted his globalizing agenda, the same agenda shared by the likes of Roberto Micheletti and the Honduran elite which has just taken power in Tegucigalpa. In the days ahead it will be interesting to see whether his fellow Republican compatriots, also believers in free trade, will be so brazen as to come out for a government which brutally represses its people.

**Nikolas Kozloff** is the author of *Hugo Chávez: Oil, Politics and the Challenge to the U.S.* (Palgrave, 2006) and *Revolution! South America and the Rise of the New Left* (Palgrave, 2008). Check out his Web site at <http://senorchichero.blogspot.com>



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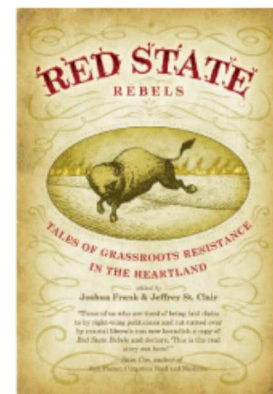
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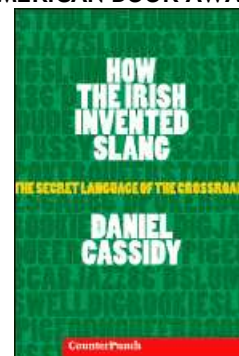
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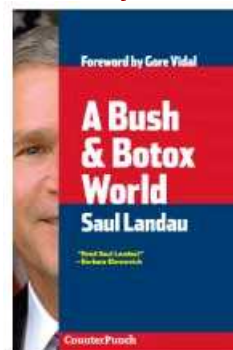
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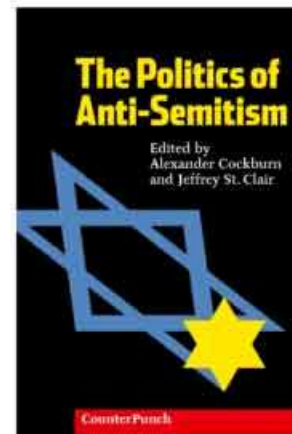
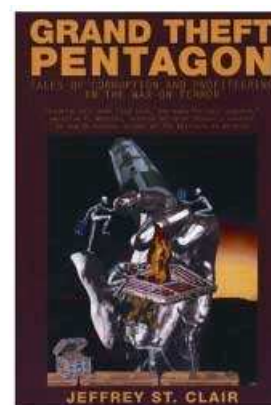
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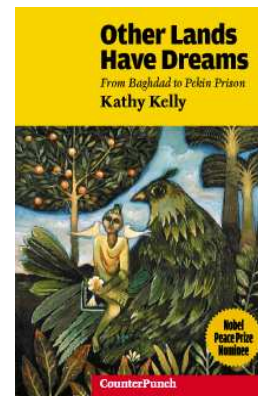
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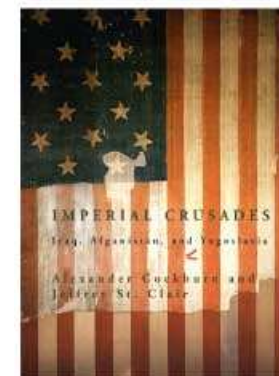
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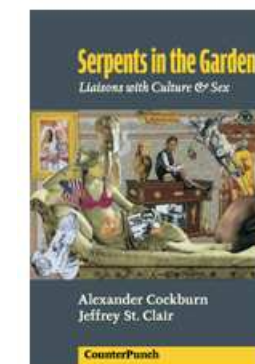
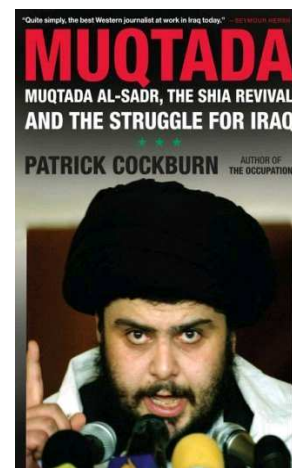
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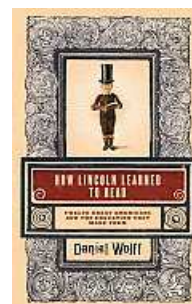
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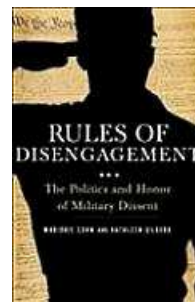


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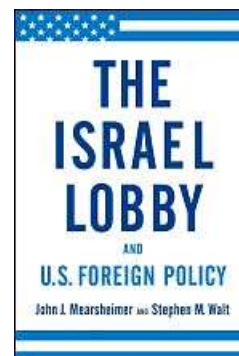


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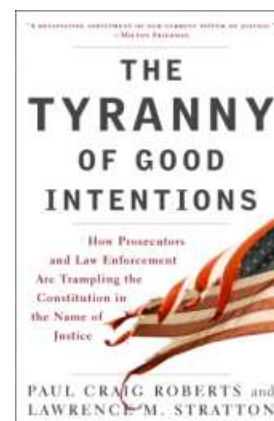
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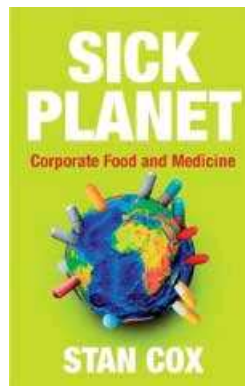
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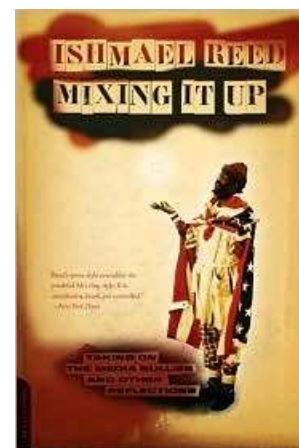
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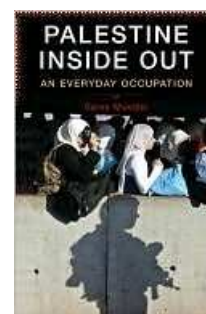
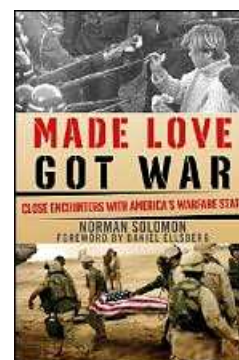
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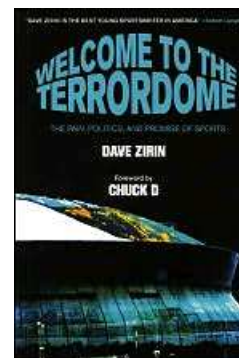
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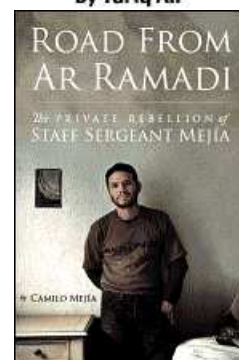
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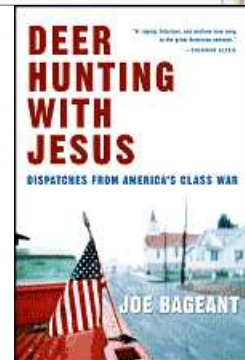
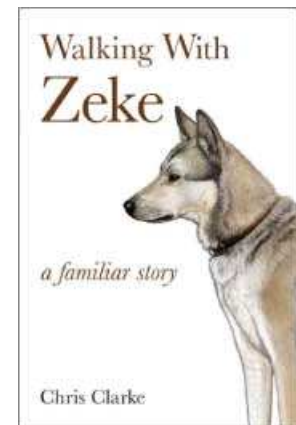
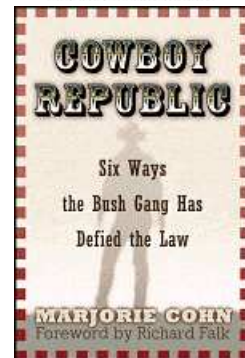
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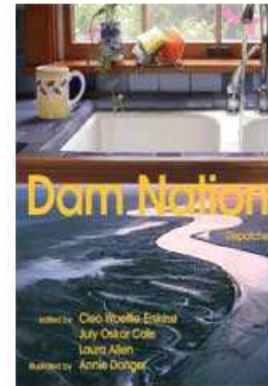
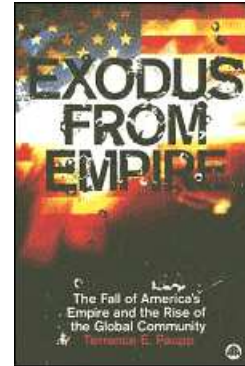
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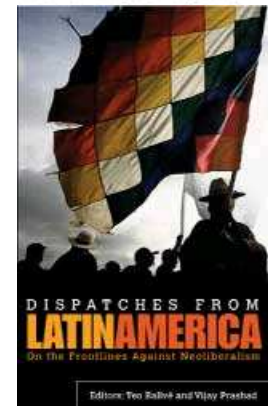
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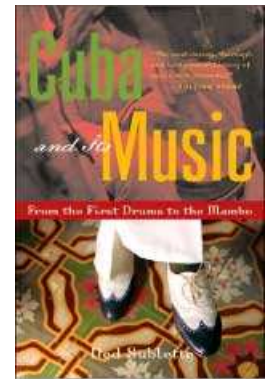
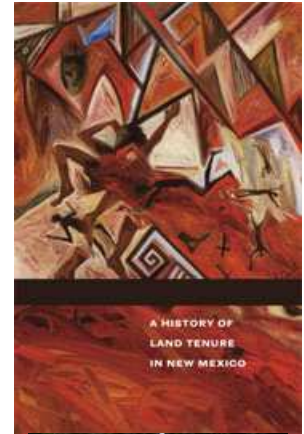
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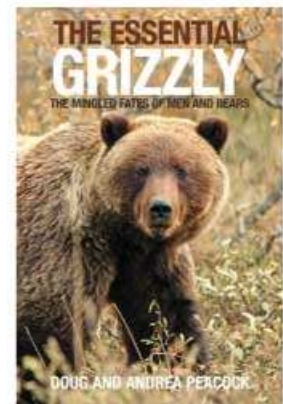
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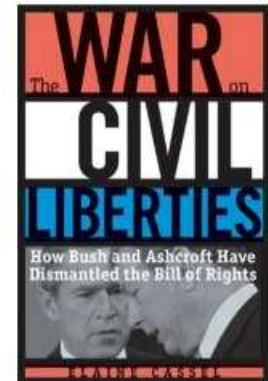
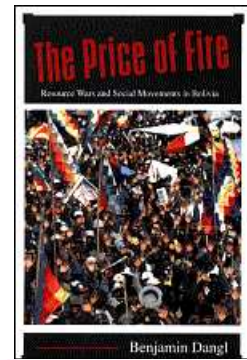
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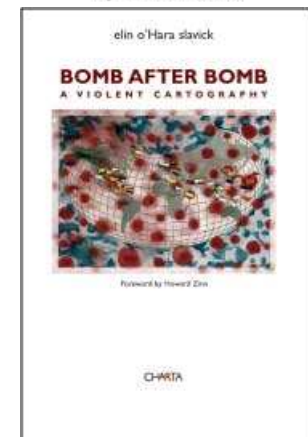
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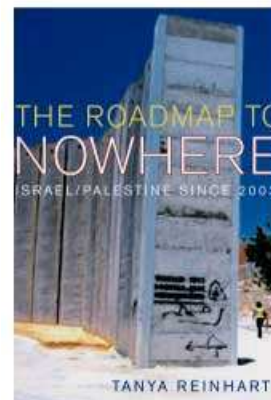
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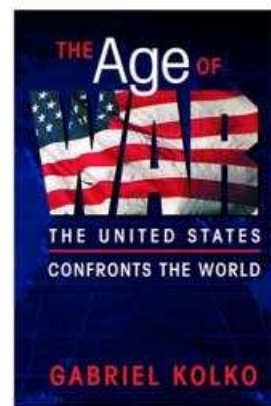
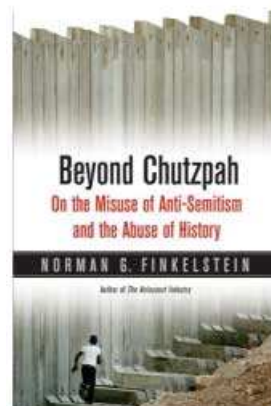
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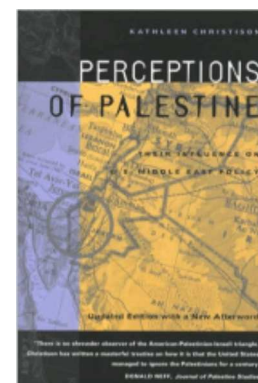
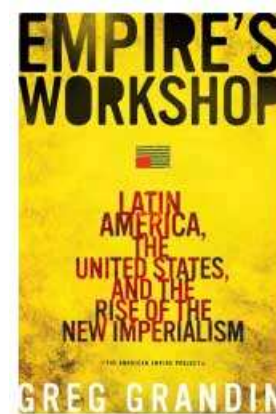
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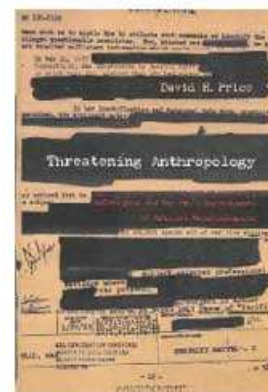
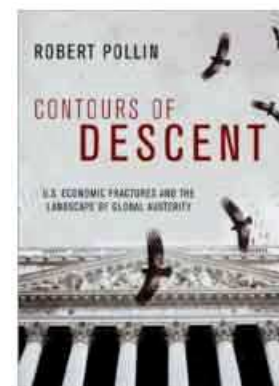
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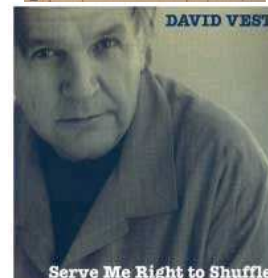
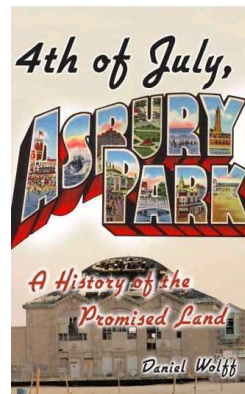
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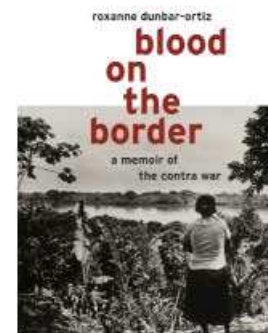
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