

NBC *White Paper: The Castro Connection*—Too Dense for an Ephemeral Broadcast but  
Stunning Documentary History Informing Reagan’s Central America Policy

Abstract: The documentary NBC *White Paper: The Castro Connection*, which aired September 3, 1980, informs the context of U.S. Central American policy prior to the 1980 presidential election, despite challenging viewers to comprehend dense content in an ephemeral broadcast. Research confirms the program thesis, that Fidel Castro unified leftist rebels in countries of the region to fight American imperialism. The program documents Castro’s connection to the leftist Nicaraguan revolution of 1979. The documentary produced a number of firsts, including for women and people of color, as well as NBC’s first contract with an independent producer for a documentary. In introducing “liberation theology,” which sought to align Western foreign policy with Christian, human, democratic values, the program reveals violent threats against missionary groups. Finally, the program foreshadowed Reagan administration acceptance of “the domino theory” to characterize communist threats from Latin America.

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