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En Busca de la Alfabetización. Three 20th Century Literacy Movements in Spanish Speaking Countries: Impacts and Implications

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En Busca de la Alfabetización
Three 20th Century Literacy Movements in Spanish Speaking Countries: Impacts and Implications

A thesis submitted in the partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Hispanic Studies from The College of William & Mary

by

Morgan Sehdev

Accepted for ________________________________________

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Monica Griffin, Ph.D.
Acknowledgments

What happens to a dream deferred? (Langston Hughes) As many know, The College of William & Mary was by no means where I had envisioned myself studying four years ago. In fact, William & Mary took me in, heartbroken by another. My English teacher and mentor at the time, upon hearing the news of what happened and my final decision in the college process, simply asked me: Morgan, what happens to a dream deferred? (We had read Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun in his class, which opens with this Langston Hughes poem.) I respond: It explodes. My time at William & Mary has been nothing short of an explosion. It feels almost fated that I would end up here, because it has been here that I have flourished, come to understand who I am, developed an appreciation for hard hitting research, and met some of the most amazing professors, mentors, and friends. The experience, the dream deferred, the explosion that has been my time at William & Mary has brought me to today, presenting this body of work and perhaps one of my proudest achievements to date. This work has not been done in isolation, though. I would like to take a moment to thank all of those who have contributed to this work and my experience.

Above all, I am extremely thankful for the guidance, support, and friendship I have found in my advisor, Prof. Jonathan Arries. Three years ago, he could have easily turned me, the overambitious sophomore, away when I asked if we could start a project together. As much as I joke about it, I am grateful every day that he decided to take up arms with me in the fight against illiteracy, as we try to understand the issue together. I would be remiss if I said I won’t feel a little lost without our regular coffee/work sessions and I won’t miss all of the debates, the conversations, and the jokes. I have never felt more challenged intellectually than during meetings with Prof. Arries, who has always set the bar high for me. Because of this, I have reached a point where I am comfortable as a Spanish speaker, cultural studies researcher, and writer. Prof. Arries: From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

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Morgan Sehdev
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Introduction

En Busca de la Alfabetización

Three 20th Century Literacy Movements in Spanish Speaking Countries: Impacts, and Implications

Why am I here? [At an ESL class] Because what makes me human is my ability to interact with others. Every day that I am unable to read and write in English and limited by sole knowledge of Spanish, I feel less human here [in the United States]. - Angél, Guatemalan migrant worker

Why Literacy?

Well... at least it happened, I thought to myself. After months of organizing, making phone calls, and recruiting participants, I had completed my first lesson for a pilot of the “People & Stories/ Gente y Cuentos” cultural reading circle with Hispanic, migrant participants from the Eastern Shore of Virginia. Locating and recruiting both participants and local partners had proved trying, if not near impossible, given the resources on the Shore. But that Sunday morning in late July, eight people finally showed up after mass to read and discuss a short story with me. We had read “Juan Darien”, by the Uruguayan writer Horacio Quiroga, a story filled with magical realism that invites readers to question, “What qualities or traits make us human?”. That week, I had caught a summer flu and found myself without a voice. A participant had to help me read the story aloud to the group, but I managed to ask all of the designated questions, raspy as my voice was. At best, I would have said it went well, but not great. Tired and little discouraged, worried about whether or not these participants would show up next week, I began cleaning up my things after the lesson when I felt a tap on my shoulder. Startled, I turned quickly. It was Angél, a middle-aged Guatemalan poultry plant worker.

“¿Puedo hacerle una pregunta?” (May I ask you a question?)
As one of the more pensive, quieter members of the group that morning I was nothing if not surprised. But I responded, “Si, por favor, pregúnteme.” (Yes, please, ask.)

He looked at the floor, collected his thoughts, let out a heavy sigh and said, “Me esperaba que, si podría hablar con usted sobre la pregunta que tuvo para todo nosotros, la pregunta sobre qué nos hace humanos. Me interesa mucho esa pregunta.” (I was wondering if I could speak with you about the question you had for all of us, the question about what makes us human. I’m really interested in that question.) I encourage him to go on. “Entonces, me pregunto mucho esta pregunta casi diariamente. Y pienso que la respuesta es la misma por la pregunta: ¿Por qué estoy aquí?” (Well, I ask myself this same question almost daily. And I think the answer is the same for the question: Why am I here?) He points to the room filled with ESL learners and reading participants. “Es porque lo que me hace humano es la habilidad a interactuar con otros. Cada día que no puedo leer o escribir en inglés, y que soy limitado por mi único conocimiento del español, siento menos humano aquí.” (Because what makes me human is my ability to interact with others. Every day that I am unable to read and write in English and limited by sole knowledge of Spanish, I feel less human here [in the United States]). Flustered that he even shared his thoughts at all, he thanked me, shook my hand, and brusquely left the church. I grabbed my things and sat in the car for some time, too absorbed in what he said to pull out of the lot. Angél’s words have both inspired me and carried me through the project that I am about to present to you.

That day, I left with more questions than answers, more feelings than facts. Having been entrenched in science for so long, my personal response to, “What makes us human?”, had been technical and empirical at best. However, throughout the discussion that day, I came to find a unique shared perspective among my Hispanic participants regarding the characteristics that distinguish humans from other organisms. In addition to Angél’s comment about reading and
communication as a vital quality, I had received responses from other participants alluding to “respect for other humans” and “emotional ties” as essential human qualities. While no subsequent “People & Stories/ Gente y Cuentos” lessons went this well, due to structural and attendance based barriers, this single class propelled a mini-ethnography on the Shore that summer and later this project. By the end of the summer, I completed a short documentary that surveyed the migrant perspective on “What makes us human?” even further. Yet I returned to campus with Angél’s words still running through my mind. From this one encounter, I personally learned just how important literacy and communication was to the human experience. To feel wholly “inhuman” due to a lack of communication skills was unfathomable to me. For the first time ever, I felt that Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, a book I had read frequently for class and will discuss in the coming chapters, was no longer an inaccessible far off text describing an aspect of Brazilian society that I would never encounter, but rather a description of the scene right before my very eyes. The English speaking society Angél found himself working for became oppressive in nature when he could no longer interact with or understand it. Yes, that day I provided Angél with a class to discuss the issue, to express the issue, to confront the issue. Yet, I had not provided any solution or aided the problem in any way. How could I? So began my fully articulated interest in literacy and its emancipatory power (as Freire puts it). From there, the questions developed quickly: What is literacy? What has been done in the fight for literacy before, historically speaking? What can be done now? Clearly, if people such as Angél could feel marginalized due to a lack of literacy within the foreign land he now found himself, there certainly had to be others feeling the same way. What was happening to them? Does our system even care? How can we provide for this population on a basic level? Would providing literacy services even help? And how do we go about providing those literacy services? This thesis is my attempt to probe and answer these questions.
Approach

Given my combined interest in cultural studies and medicine, ultimately unified by a concern for the human condition, the project originally proposed to answer these questions was quite different than the work I present here today. At first, I had hoped to present an applied case study of “People & Stories/ Gente y Cuentos”, a cultural reading circle designed to promote experience-based discussions of short stories that have been read aloud in the group setting. This program challenges the question, “Who owns literature?”, in demonstrating to participants of various backgrounds that a lived experience is equally if not more valuable in understanding a story once thought to be only for those of the educated upper class. The program, originally conducted in Spanish with Latino participants, provides an optimal tool for dissecting opinions and perceptions of the participating group. Therefore, I hoped to use the program as a tool to understand how local Williamsburg Latinos describe, understand, and perceive health related topics. Through the application of discourse analysis, my goal was to propose potential conceptual metaphors that Latinos might use in expressing these perceptions. These metaphors, I believe, could then be applied to current cultural competency practices in medicine. In the end, I hoped to review the current state of cultural competency and propose how to integrate my new approach. Sometimes, however, a project proposal, no matter how well thought out and prepared, remains just that: a proposal. After a semester’s worth of waiting outside the Williamsburg Public Library with Prof. Arries, hoping that someone had heard our announcement in church or seen our bus advertisement about “Free Literacy Classes”, we had no participants to show for our efforts. No class, no conversation, no data, no discourse analysis, no thesis. As a result, I thought deeply about the implications of doing community participation based research and how one must fully integrate themselves into a community before one can expect people to show up to meetings, classes, or
discussions. Despite prior experience with this form of outreach in a pre-established research effort, nothing compared to learning this lesson from the ground up and on my own. I know that I will carry the experience and subsequent reflection with me for the rest of my days as a community researcher. My original proposal at best provides inspiration for a potentially successful graduate dissertation (given the proper participation and resources, of course). And at the very least, we can chalk it up to a success for the wisdom of John Steinbeck: *The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry*...

In an attempt to re-chart the course I would take in answering the questions still left burning from that summer, I began to rethink my approach. Perhaps these questions were not ready to be answered or investigated empirically, especially seeing as I would need much more time to gain the necessary access into a community of potential participants. Perhaps instead, I needed to understand these questions in the context of history and theory. Through several conversations with advisors and mentors the common theme of my questions emerged: literacy. Having constantly viewed this project as a “cultural studies approach” to improving cultural competency, I had hoped to improve the structure of the health system. Through the theme of literacy, I found a means to understand the general population affected by health and the provision of health care. Literacy is a skill not only necessary on the part of the care providers but on the part of the care receivers. The new proposal yielded an opportunity to study, understand, and explain a larger population. But first, it was necessary to ask: what is literacy?

To understand this further, I decided to first look at three examples of literacy movements. In these movements, I could probe the meaning of literacy as I examined three nations’ transitions from illiteracy to literacy, understanding the term literacy by itself as much as I was by its definitional other, illiteracy. Therefore, answering, “What is literacy?” and “How do we promote/
teach literacy?” was made possible by examining the Spanish Pedagogical Missions (1931), the Cuban Literacy Campaign (1961), and the Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade (1980). To understand each movement, I believe that it is necessary to investigate the following aspects: prior history and educational environment, implementation of the movement, demonstrable outcomes, various critiques, and possible lessons learned from the movement. Therefore, these will be the essential components of each case study. After presenting each case study individually, I will then analyze them through a theoretical application in order to draw conclusions about any potential shared traits among the three. The shared traits that emerge, I hypothesize, will be indicative of common “best practices” when it comes to promoting the acquisition of literacy skills. In this analysis, I aim to wrestle with the definition of literacy as well. “Literacy” has become a contested term, and so only after presenting examples and contextualizing literacy theory, do I believe it possible to define the term - hence a delay in providing a solid definition until the end of this work. After analyzing the movements in conjunction with one another, I will address what I believe to be a current issue in the field of literacy here at home in the United States and the movement I would propose conducting in order to combat the issue.
Chapter 1: SPAIN

Spain: Las Misiones Pedagógicas (1931 -1936)

On the basis of civic culture, literacy rates, and economic development, it might be judged that by 1930 Spain was at the level of England in the 1850s and 1860s or France in the 1870s of 1880s. - Stanley G. Payne

Civilized Spanish culture, that’s what we brought with us. Not the religious education they had been accustomed to... it was a Spanish education. In the end, we sought to bring them closer to the treasure of national wisdom, not bring them out to pray.
- Gonzalo Anaya, misionero 1931-1934

Introduction

As Spain attempted to cling on to its last remaining imperial landholdings, all national efforts and resources were directed at maintaining the imperial monarchy, only to have it all crumble in 1898. The power vacuum that had been created brought forth many contesting political parties and ideologies. Following King Alfonso XIII’s abdication, the Second Republic was established on April 14, 1931 through the process of democratic elections. The new government inherited a country that was defined by social inequalities and in some cases quite “backwards”, with near feudal conditions in the rural peripheries and marginalized sectors in the more modern urban centers. Part of this uneven social situation had been attributed to the extremely high rates of illiteracy: over one half of the national population was illiterate, with some individual towns reporting illiteracy rates as high as 71% (Harrison 27). In an attempt to promote the necessary social reforms, the Republican leadership recruited Manuel Bartolomé Cossío, a well-respected Krausist educator in Madrid, to help implement a national literacy movement. As a result, Cossío and his team developed the Misiones Pedagógicas, Pedagogical Missions. Both a literacy
campaign and cultural promotion, the Missions came to represent a truly “Spanish education”, according to missionaries like Gonzalo Anaya, in so much that the lessons stressed a common culture and identity. The Missions disrupted the continued tradition of rote memorization in a parochial school system that was reserved for those of the upper classes. In its place, an active and experience based-program was sent to all corners of the country. These Missions, staffed by university students and teachers (collectively called missionaries), brought traveling libraries, circulating museums, temporary theaters, and makeshift cinemas, hoping to not only improve the national literacy rates but to create an awareness of “what it meant to be Spanish” and to develop a unified identity as citizens of a democratic republic. These missionaries sought to bring the rural peripheries up to speed with the rest of the 20th century. After five years, the Missions came to crashing halt with the beginning of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. While some have claimed that the efforts were unsuccessful in achieving complete national literacy, the Missions did in fact improve functional literacy rates and ultimately educated new groups of learners in remote regions of Spain about the pleasure and value of culture, something that cannot inherently be measured.

Spain before the “Missions”

At the close of the 19th century, the once tremendously influential and powerful Iberian country of Spain found itself, by European standards, an impoverished country. By the end of the Spanish American War in 1898, Spain had no colonial holdings, a failing economy that was dependent on the agrarian sector, and to top it all off over one half of its adult population was illiterate (with rates as high as 71% in various regions) (Harrison 27; Vincent 57). As it approached the impending millennial crossroads, Spain was in “Crisis,” -- with changing nationalist
sentiments, loss of colonial prowess, and a tumultuous social, political, and economic climate. Leading Spanish intellectuals and writers, later named the “Generation of 98”, were focused on fortifying the movement towards “Regeneration” of the Spanish nation, a movement started nearly twenty years earlier, before the collapse of the First Spanish Republic. Time and energy so painstakingly focused on maintaining Cuba and the Philippines caused Spain to fall behind its Western European counterparts. Thus, the Crisis left many Spaniards in favor of “Regeneration”, crying out to “Europeanize!” in hopes that they would soon attain the luxuries afforded to their European neighbors (Blinkhorn 12). The terms “Regenerationists” or “regenerationism”, “became catchwords on everyone’s lips, from elder statesmen to striking workers” (Balfour 26). Under the “Restoration regime” of the reinstated monarchy after the fall of the First Republic, the desired social reform on the part of the Regenerationists had been heavily lobbied for yet had failed “to achieve much besides balancing the nation’s books” (Balfour 26). With the abdication of the throne on the part of King Alfonso XIII and a democratic election in 1931, the Restoration period finally came to an end. At the advent of this new democratic government, later known as the Second Republic, “the stakes seemed higher [with respect to Regenerationist reform] to the coalition of bourgeois democrats, Socialists, and liberal intellectuals who formed the first Provisional Government on April 15 1931” (Boyd 194). These reformers believed that, among other social policy necessary to correct drastic social inequalities that had developed over the past several decades in Spain, “educating Spaniards in the values appropriate to a republican civic culture was the bedrock on which the Republic must be erected” (Boyd 194). As a part of this educational

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mission, the *Misiones Pedagógicas* (Pedagogical Missions) emerge as a non-formal education initiative to promote increased literacy and cultural awareness among all Spaniards.

In order to understand the literacy movement, it is first necessary to recognize that the decades following the Crisis of 1898 provide the history fueling its ultimate success. Among various economic and political policies put in place after 1898, were several socially targeted policies, many aimed at educational reforms. Pressure from those that emerged from the Crisis as “Regenerationists” called on the government to seek solutions and improvements in order to fix the “lacking” educational system (Pozo Andrés 125). In April of 1900, the Spanish government installed the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts (royal decree 18 April 1900) to appease the Regenerationists and initiate future educational reform. With the new ministry in place, Spain had the capacity to enact the *Ley Moyano*, approved forty-three years earlier, which called for compulsory elementary education for all Spanish children, with specific regulations for the training, hiring, and paying of educators (Vincent 53). Until that point, Spain lacked the resources to make compulsory education a reality. These actions on the part of the Spanish government signalled the beginning of the necessary education reform in Spain.

The effects of these actions would not be felt for some time as education reformers asked, answered, and then re-answered various questions regarding pedagogy and practice over the next couple of decades. Consider this:

“From 1902 to 1923 there were 53 different ministers with different ideologies and professions that headed the Ministry of Public Instruction (Puelles Benítez 217). Moreover, several ministers were named more than once, which resulted in rapid decision making and continual postponements. During this period, a great deal of energy was invested in issues related to the freedom of teaching, professorship, and science. Other issues, such as religion
in school curricula and the requirement of a teaching degree for teaching in Catholic schools, were also discussed. Controversies between conservatives and liberals shaded the achievements made” (Flecha García 19).

Constant turnover within the Ministry and added disputes regarding teaching style, course content, and accessibility plagued the educational system as the Regenerationists sought to implement their desired social change. Despite the transient nature of Ministry leadership and ideals, three main legislative and administrative objectives within the educational sector would prove essential to the future of the Pedagogical Missions ushered in with the Second Republic: 1. Accessibility of education on the basis of age, class, and gender; 2. Higher education reform for the purpose of teacher education and a diversified workforce; 3. Instructional development in order to promote the desired pedagogy and increase literacy rates.

Due to a growing need to incorporate more female, lower class, and older students into the educational system, the Ministry began passing significant legislation early on. In 1909, mandatory education attendance was increased to 12 years of age, a three year bump from the once regulated requirement of schooling from the age of 6 to 9 years of age. At the same time, legislation was passed that would accommodate the increased number of students and promote equal education to both the male and female students. The Ministry took over the teacher colleges that were designated preparation facilities for instructors who hoped to teach primary school. In doing so, the Ministry promoted equal consideration of male and female students in the primary school system. These actions, however, did not automatically ensure equal educational provision and access to female students. The Ministry passed an act in 1910 that “freed women from having to

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3 Gaceta de Madrid, published 4 June 1909.
consult Superiors’ when they wished to enroll for university, as the general sense of the legislation for Public Instruction is not to distinguish on the basis of sex, authorizing the admission of male and female students on equal terms” (Flecha García 19). In turn, a trickle-down effect was seen at the elementary level, as more female students were welcomed into the classroom. In towns and provinces where public education did not immediately promote gender based equality in the classroom, private Catholic organizations assumed responsibility for female elementary education until the public sector could welcome and accommodate them (Flecha García 22). Finally, the Ministry conceded that public education was not only of the utmost importance within the more wealthy areas of the country but of the economically disadvantaged areas as well, and began devoting energy and resources to such regions. For the first time in Spanish history, intellectual ideology promoted a truly universal outlook (Flecha García 21). With these ideals in place, the close of the Restoration period, under General Primo de Rivera, saw an outburst of tremendous effort and resources on the part of the government to build and improve schools in areas serving a larger number of students on a subsequently more equal (in respect to gender, age, and class) basis (Storm 144).

With this growing student body, Spain required a larger pool of qualified and adept instructors. In 1914, Minister Francisco Bergamín signed into law a reform that mandated that future teachers for primary school instruction receive four years of training in theory and practicum in order to meet the goals of the newly established cultural, pedagogical, and didactic programs (Casado Marcos de León 89). This eliminated the former double degree: two years to obtain an elementary teaching degree and two additional years to obtain a secondary teaching degree (Berrio 128). This modified teacher training curriculum more students and prepared more teachers to enter the field of education, as two separate degrees were no longer necessary and the training was
altogether more thorough and holistic than before. All that was needed now were teaching materials that reflected the goals of these infrastructural reforms.

With the influx of students and the increased recruitment of teachers into the Spanish educational system, the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts sought to provide sufficient educational materials that also aligned with the changing pedagogy of the time. This task, however, proved to be a great challenge in terms of time and resources. To respond to the growing demand, the Ministry therefore began to implement educational manuals that were translated from programs in English, French, and German and that closely resembled the goals of the developing Spanish pedagogy (Berrio 128). These texts, however, were from the decade preceding 1898 and included outdated, unrelated content. The only information that articulated the current goals and educational models were brief “forewords” written by Spanish instructors that outlined the precise goals of the new Spanish educational model. According to the bibliographic study of over 60 teaching manuals from the early 1900s in Spain by Berrio (131), these early iterations were by no means sufficient to promote the goals of a more widespread and equal educational model, nor would they reach that point until the 1930s when the texts could be rewritten by Spanish instructors themselves. This early struggle to provide sufficient materials was to be expected, however, as the Ministry needed to continue developing and passing foundational legislation that established a system capable of handling new and tailored teaching manuals. Regardless of the insufficiencies, these early translated manuals proved to the Regenerationists that the desired reforms were on the horizon and were easing the transition from the once stagnant system to a more dynamic one.

Much like the delay seen between the passing and actual implementation of the Ley Moyano, the policies regarding student access, teacher training, and teaching materials experienced a certain degree of lag time between policy formation and successful implementation.
These three components, the most important to the establishment of the Pedagogical Missions that would soon follow in order to further increase literacy and education in Spain, were only several of the many initiatives taken on by the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts at the time. These policies were foundational in that they set precedents and outlined the specific goals of the educational advocates within the government. At the same time, several individuals created their own examples and precedents that would later combine with the legislative actions during Spain’s Second Republic to yield what would be the Pedagogical Missions. For instance, the Free Institution of Education (FIE) (Institución Libre de Enseñanza (ILE)) of Francisco Giner de los Ríos, known as one of the first modern educators of Spain, established a pedagogy that claimed “education should unite children, not divide them” (Lipp 172). Pedagogy employed by the FIE incorporated values that placed special emphasis on the blending of cultural, scientific, and diversified subject matter from at home and abroad (Lipp 172). In a similar vein, the anarchist Ferrer Guardia and his establishment of the Modern School provided a social organization approach to understand literacy and methodological applications (Noa 102). Additionally, programs such as the New School, established in 1911 by Nuñez de Arenas, a socialist, investigated topics such as the social problem of illiteracy, the current actions being taken by the Spanish government, and the pre-existing materials from theorists and educators around the world regarding literacy movements (Ferrer 20). These efforts, in conjunction with the legislative actions on the part of the Spanish government and inspiration from social reform championed by the Regnerationists, educators and university students that would enter the era of the Second Republic with newfound energy. Soon the popular education movement of the Pedagogical Missions began to develop, which would bring literacy to the rural Spaniards that did not benefit from any of the reforms during Regeneration.
Early attempts by these educational reformists, primarily Ferrer Guardia of the Modern School and Francisco Giner de los Ríos of the Free Institution of Education, led to early efforts on the part of educational missions said to later inspire the Republic’s formal call for Educational or Pedagogical Missions within the rural populations. In 1907, legislation requiring that provincial juntas, or small governing bodies, report back to a central junta regarding local educational shortcomings and outcomes created an open dialogue that generated an intellectual dialogue regarding pedagogy on a larger scale. Conferences began to take place in order to facilitate these conversations and became known as fiestas escolares, scholarly fairs/parties (Garrido 149). During such events, educators such as Giner de los Ríos began to disseminate information regarding his free, interactive, and secular form of primary education being piloted at the Free Institution for Education. Frequently ideas about traveling libraries, scholarly museums, and educational materials for adults were also shared and presented at these fiestas escolares (Garrido 150). These presentations are credited as providing the necessary inspiration for the Pedagogical Missions later. Giner de los Ríos persistently lobbied government officials from this point forward, especially as he saw all educational policy benefit the urban Spanish population and neglect the rural population. However, the chaos and rapid turnover within the Ministry for Public Instruction and Fine Arts prevented the educational programming to go beyond these fiestas escolares. This left Giner de los Ríos, his disciples, and his ideas about universal literacy movements waiting for the reform that would come during the Second Republic.

**Las Misiones Pedagógicas**

The liberal tumult that challenged the conservative Spanish government during the mid-1800s before the final collapse of the Empire in 1898 pre-established the Regenerationist mindset
that would allow for the ultimate installation of the Second Republic by 1931 (Payne 15). The parliamentary monarchy that had been established before the close of the Spanish American war continued on into the late 1920s, while the conservative Liberal party, the Republican Party, and mixed Socialist and Anarchist parties began to further divide and develop (Ross 48). All the while, despite political transience, regeneration in the name of modernization took place. As Spanish educational reform progressed, the country experienced its highest level of economic growth in over a century (Payne 20). Amidst political turbulence and an unpopular war raging in the Moroccan protectorate, King Alfonso XIII appointed General Primo de Rivera as a stand in monarchical dictator in 1923, unaware that this would lead to the eventual dissolution of the monarchy entirely. Political endeavors on the part of Primo de Rivera, while socially unifying and at times beneficial, created distrust within the government and army when he finally sought to revise the constitution in 1929 (Ross 47; Payne 26). During the final years of the Primo de Rivera regime, Republican opposition mounted. When King Alfonso XII finally abdicated the throne in 1931, the nation called for a democratic election which the Republicans overwhelmingly won (Ross 50). Throughout the Restoration period that preceded this election several cultural agents, such as Giner de los Ríos, had emerged as the, at times clandestine, opposition to the restoration of the Monarchy and the Catholic Church. The missions of these cultural agents provided some of the inspiration for Republican social and cultural reform that would take place. With the establishment of a new Republic and new Constitution on top of some of the pre-existing educational framework developed by the Ministry of Public Instruction and Fine Arts, Spain could face the problem of illiteracy head on and continue implementing social reform.
With the new government came the new Spanish Constitution of 1931. In it, among other considerations made to support the wellbeing of the Spanish population, was Article 48 which promoted the acquisition of Spanish culture on a national level:

“Article 48. The service of culture is essential function of the State, and provided through educational institutions linked by the unified school system. Primary education is free and compulsory. Teachers, professors and lecturers of formal education are civil servants. The Academic freedom is recognized and guaranteed. The Republic shall legislate in the sense of providing Spaniards who are economically needy access to all levels of education, so that is conditioned only by skill and vocation. Instruction will be secular, will work at the heart of its business and will draw on methodological ideals of human solidarity. The right of Churches, subject to state inspection, to teach their doctrines in their own establishments is recognized.” (Spanish Const. Art. 48, translated by Comparative Constitutions Project).

This proclamation of the government’s recognition of the value of culture ushered in the official movement of the Pedagogical Missions. Shortly after the ratification of the new Constitution, the Republican government by means of an official order created the Patronage of Educational Missions, complete with a Board of Trustees led by Manuel Bartolomé Cossío. While this was the first time that Cossío held an official position, it was not the beginning of his work in pedagogy and educational reform.4

During the early 1900s, Cossío worked closely under Francisco Giner de los Rios at the Free Institute for Education (FIE) and quickly became one of Giner de los Rios’s most avid pedagogical disciples. The two worked tirelessly to advocate education in rural areas of Spain,

4 Gaceta de Madrid, published 29 May 1931
hoping to one day take “the best teachers to Spain’s most remote and cut-off villages so that their inhabitants, who existed in a mental universe remote from that of Enlightenment culture and the Industrial Revolution, could become participants in the modern culture that had taken root in Spanish cities” (Cossío 85). Reforms that had taken place under the constitutional monarchy and the Ministry for Public Instruction and Fine Arts had brought tremendous progress to those who lived closest to the resources available in the more affluent regions of Spain, despite each policy’s universal intentions. In discussing the social disparities between the rural and urban areas of Spain at the time, scholars describe the two as separate worlds, with one entering modernity and one stuck in the middle ages (Acacia Films 2007). Therefore, when the Republican government took note of the pleas on the part of Cossío and Giner de los Ríos during their legal instatement of the Pedagogical Missions, they took explicit measures and said that the purpose of the missions would be to:

“Bring to the Spanish people, in particular those living in rural locations, the spirit of progress and the means to participate in it, and in its moral stimuli and its examples of universal progress, with the result that all villages in Spain, even the most remote, can share in the advantages and elevated pleasures currently only available in urban locations” (Otero Urtaza 207 -- translation of “Patronato de Misiones Pedagógicas 1934). With a Board of Trustees teeming with intellectuals from across the country and explicit support from the government, the Pedagogical Missions movement and the literacy revolution that would ensue could begin. All that was missing were teachers.

Policy makers during the pre-Republican era made unique provisions in order to incentivize teacher education and hoped to recruit more qualified individuals as school instructors. These efforts, however, were unsuccessful and left the country with a shortage of teachers (Flecha
Cossío, seeing how far he himself had come as a student of Giner de los Ríos and the FIE, proposed the recruitment of previous FIE students, many of whom were now at universities or had become teachers themselves. Decades later these students reflect on their willingness and preparedness to accept the role as missionaries. Many claimed that this opportunity was their chance to “have the university student rebellion against Primo de Rivera that they never could have during the dictatorship” (Acacia Films 2007). Successfully recruiting these students as missionaries, Cossío had managed to assemble an intellectually rich and diverse group of individuals. In fact, this is considered one of the very few ventures during the Second Republic in which rightists and leftists worked together peacefully (241). Chronicling the over 700 missionaries that would become a part of the Missions, Ruiz Berrio’s found that they came from diverse schools of thought: conservative Catholics, enlightened Catholics, young orthodox and Trotskyite communists, socialists and followers of the Bolshevist revolution, libertarian members of the Iberian Anarchistic Federation, militants of the United Socialist Youth, and yet a huge majority were just youthful republican educators (Berrio 244, Roith 3). The youth and educational training shared by the participants was to be expected considering that the official document of the Patronage or the Patronato clearly outlined two requirements of the missionary: “la primera, sentirse atraído por las orientaciones en que la Misión se inspira, germen de la probable devoción y hasta del entusiasmo venideros; la segunda, tener algo para su ofertorio y aspiración a conquistar la suficiente gracia para llegar con ella al ánimo de las gentes humildes” first, they must be drawn to the orientations under which the Mission was inspired, with hints of probable devotion and even the enthusiasm to come; The second, to have skills to offer and the aspiration to conquer with this spirit in order to reach that of the humble people” (Otero Urtaza 208). This diverse group of missionaries would greatly affect and shape the outcomes of the Missions later.
With missionaries on board, Cossío and his primary theorist on the Board of Trustees, Luis Santullano, began to develop the missions more fully. Aside from the theory and knowledge that the two developed in conjunction with Giner de los Ríos at the FIE, they were left with little information or examples on which to base their own Missions. Cossío and Santullano looked abroad for potential inspiration. One potential source of help was Mexico, who was in the middle of its own Misión Cultural (Cultural Mission), however aside from aiding rural teachers and populations, the Mexican and Spanish efforts had wholly different goals (Boza Puerta 41). This left Cossío and Santullano in uncharted territory, starting with a clean slate from which to design the Missions. In the end, the three tenets of the Missions as designed by Cossío and Santullano were to: promote general culture, develop an educational orientation (combat illiteracy), and cultivate citizenship education (Roith 35). Beyond improving literacy rates, critics believe that the Pedagogical Missions had no “useful or productive aims”, meaning that “culture” embodied by art, film, theater, and books are products of “upper class” leisure; Cossío, however, hoped to use the Pedagogical Missions as a way to teach the rural, lower class population and as a way to prove that the leisure of culture was a universal luxury (Otero Urtaza 208). In accordance with these goals, Cossío and Santullano then decided to equip each missionary with the following: a projector, educational and recreational films, mobile libraries, color copies of famous paintings, a gramophone with various accompanying records, and educational materials to leave behind for local teachers long after the missionaries left (Garrido 158). After sufficient training and acquiring their bundle of materials, the missionaries were ready to set off for the rural pueblos, towns.

Despite their educational training and access to material resources, no amount of preparation could ready the missionaries for what they encountered in the villages. After trekking miles across the countryside and even mountainside atop burros loaded with books and supplies,
the young teams of missionaries entered rural towns to find them teeming with wide-eyed skeptics. In the words of one missionary, Carmen Caamano, interviewed for the documentary *Las Misiones Pedagógicas*, “We [the missionaries] were so far removed from their world that it was as if we came from another galaxy, from places that they could not even imagine existed, not to mention how we dressed or what we ate, or how we talked. We were different.” (Acacia Films 2007). Missionaries met with mayors and local teachers to explain their objectives and to seek local backing. Once their presence was welcomed or at the very least tolerated, the missionaries announced to the public when and where they would hold their sessions. These sessions typically took place in the central plaza during the afternoons so as to ensure the most participation (Garrido 154; Acacia Films 2007). Some missionaries recall setting up in the plaza that first afternoon and hearing children scream out to them, “Comunista! Comunista!/ Communist! Communist!” Despite this harsh criticism and implicit fear of the communist agenda within the town many of townspeople showed up to the lessons. Missionaries believed that many showed up out of sheer curiosity the first afternoon, but showed up the second afternoon because their curiosity had become genuine interest (Acacia Films 2007). During that first encounter with the town as a whole, the missionaries read aloud a message penned by Cossío himself, in which he detailed the purpose of the Pedagogical Missions, decried any political agenda associated with them, and explained his opinion on the importance of culture and leisure in simple terms (Roith 5). This opening ceremony of sorts would set the tone for the days or weeks that ensued as the missionaries presented an array of lessons, cultural artefacts, films, and performances to the community. They quickly turned the initial skepticism into welcome appreciation on the part of the townspeople.

**Facets of Each Mission**
Once a Mission commenced, each village was presented with a host of cultural productions and educational lessons; I will outline some of these here. Less well documented in the literature are the Missions’ measures to “cultivate citizenship education”. What is known, however, is that special lectures were held in town plazas during which the missionaries would read aloud the articles of the new Constitution most pertinent to the community, they would answer questions regarding the townspeople’s rights as Spanish citizens, and they would ensure that all participants left with a newfound sense of belonging within the Spanish Republic (Acacia Films 2007). The other two goals to “promote general culture” and “develop an educational orientation” were achieved through the employment of libraries, films, travelling museums, theatrical performances, and teaching materials.

Las Bibliotecas: The Libraries

In the hopes of establishing both a literate and cultured Spanish population, the “bibliotecas circulantes” and mobile libraries became one of the most common practices of Cossío’s Pedagogical Missions. Matilde Moliner, with assistance from Antonio Machado, sat on the Patronage Board of Trustees as the Director of the Libraries and hand selected the books that would circulate through the countryside. Missionaries described the assemblages as “simple yet efficient” as many missions found themselves limiting the number of books that they traveled with based on the number of crates they could load onto their donkeys (or mules) (Acacia Films 2007). Over the course of the five years between the start of the Second Republic and the Spanish Civil War, the Missions amassed nearly 600,000 books that would travel as part of about 5500 libraries (Otero Urtaza 211). With the supervision and assistance of village teachers, the Missionaries deposited the crates of books at the local school, where they also held frequent reading lessons, read aloud to small groups still learning to read for themselves, and taught those interested about the book
loan system that was easily facilitated by their check-in/check-out registry (Garrido 156). The books available to borrow truly ran the genre based gamut. Considerations were made for the adult and child readers when books were selected to travel in the library. The libraries also contained: Spanish and universal literature, classical and modern literature, science and art, essays and poems, instructional and leisurely texts, biographies and fables (Garrido 156; Serra 5). The presence of Missionaries in the schools also promoted intense collaboration between them and the teachers, an interaction Cossío had prepared the young volunteers for ahead of time as he equipped them with manuals, teaching guides, and other resources to leave with the teachers. Pablo Gutiérrez Moreno worked with Cossío to develop a teaching course that missionaries could give to any village instructor that requested it; the course’s main goals was to encourage each teacher’s self-confidence and to cultivate the belief that his or her own efforts and inspiration were enough (Otero Urtaza 210). While tremendously helpful in raising the literacy rate above 70%, right-wing military and government officials blamed the books and teaching courses for troublesome social awareness (Ortiz 74).

*La Música, El Coro, El Teatro: Music, Choir, and Theater*

Culture, of course, goes beyond the pages of a book and the Patronage recognized that. Music comprised a large part of the Spanish cultural identity, thus making the gramophone and its accompanying records one of the main staples in every mission. During every free moment, when a performance was not taking place or a lesson was not being given, the gramophone played in the background: in the plaza, at school, at local shops (Garrido 157). Whenever Alejandro Casona, the Board member in charge of directing “The People’s Theater and Choir”, could not locate records that had recordings of folk music specific to the region each Mission would go, he required that the choir record their own version, in the hopes of promoting regional identification through folk
songs while at the same time promoting national identification through a traditional tango or ballad (Acacia Films 2007; Roith 39). Despite the fact that the impact of music was widespread in the rural communities, it was the theater that captivated audiences.

Missionaries set up stages in the central plazas almost immediately upon arrival, as some fifty or so students would prepare for their performances (Roith 42). With simple backdrops and brightly colored costumes and props, the performers reenacted classical works from Cervantes, Juan de la Encina, Lope de Rueda, and Calderón de la Barca -- all chosen for their basic and easily comprehensible yet captivating scripts (Fernández Soria 336; Otero Urtaza 216). For the villages too remote to access with the stage and costumes in tow, Cossío commissioned the playwright Rafael Dieste to compose a series of “puppet theater” scripts. These scripts depicted popular comic tales and plays, while also incorporating common precepts, proverbs, and orally circulated sayings that had yet to make their way into the rural vernacular (Otero Urtaza 217). The didactic goals of the theater and choir were long felt, as these ideals remained a part of rural culture long after the stages had been dismantled.

*Las Películas: The Movies*

Missionaries hailed the movie projections as the most crowd-pleasing component of the Missions. During later interviews, for the documentary *Las Misiones Pedagógicas*, with the villagers that had grown up during the Missions, their fondest and most vivid memories are of the sights that rolled before their eyes on makeshift theater screens (Acacia Films 2007). Regular screenings in the afternoons and evenings created a space for Missionaries to share any of the 156 films the Patronage had on hand, with a subject matter ranging from silent Charlie Chaplin films to instructional tapes on how to properly plant various seeds (Garrido 157). The films brought sights of things villagers had never seen nor dreamt of, for the first time many of them saw
automobiles, saw cities beyond their village, saw people of color or of different classes or of different regions in the country (Roith 45; Acacia Films 2007). Many times, the subject matter of silent films was beyond comprehension for the younger and less educated members of the audience, which created the perfect opportunity for Missionaries to narrate and present valuable lessons for the viewing parties (Acacia Films 2007). These moments, among the most memorable, are considered some of the most instructional and easily accessible from the entirety of the Missions.

**Los Museos Circulantes: The Travelling Museums**

The final component of the travelling Missionary’s load would be the “Travelling Museum”. Taking advantage of his connection to the Prado Museum in Madrid, Cossío commissioned the reproduction of fourteen of the most famous Spanish paintings in the museum, including painters such as Goya, El Greco, and Velásquez (Rodríguez Fernández-Salgueiro 3). Today, these paintings are representations of some of the most iconic Spanish art, but at the time the villagers could not even fathom that part of their own heritage or even the idea of entering an establishment such as the Prado. This is why the travelling museum played such a crucial role in the cultural goals of the Missions, because it was able to make Spanish art something accessible not just to the upper class but something for “every class” (Acacia Films 2007). The paintings were displayed in townhalls and school rooms as Cossio attempted to create a “fairground type feel” and display in the act of presenting the museum (Afinoguénova 274). Stylistically, this drew crowds that, in turn, gave Luis Cernuda, the Board member in charge of the museums, a full house to amuse and educate with his descriptions and commentaries about each painting (Otero Urtaza 216; Afinoguénova 275). For the towns that could not facilitate the museum or were too far to
reach, small color copies were distributed and left with the children and teachers, allowing all participants a chance to enjoy some form of the travelling museum.

Outcomes, Repercussions, Critiques

The year 1934 marked a turning point for the Pedagogical Missions and Spain as a whole. A successful miner uprising in the province of Asturias in October against the new Conservative government sent leftist party members into a panic. The Republicans, who decided to take advantage of the successful uprising, quickly disseminated an account of the bloody 1934 Uprising and gained support across the countryside (Bunk 68). Fearful of the impending Civil War, the now conservative Catholic government, the CEDA who had won over the Republicans in the 1933 election, curtailed many of the Republicans’ once prosperous and glorified social efforts in order to refocus its energy and resources. In fact, the Pedagogical Missions were one of the first efforts to be targeted. According to the fearful government, the once beneficial literacy movement had turned “sour” so to speak, as Asturias was one of the primary provinces visited by the Missions and one of the most library laden provinces because of this (Acacia Films 2007). To the Republican government, this correlation yielded enough causation to limit the Patronage’s activities and outreach. The CEDA was left wondering: Would an illiterate Asturias still have launched such an attack on the government? The Missions continued over the next year, but never again with the same enthusiasm and support. The Civil War in 1936 brought with it the fall of the Republic on April 1, 1939, the rise of the fascist Falange party under Franco, and the subsequent end to the Pedagogical Missions, as the incoming dictatorship did not view this educational initiative as a priority in its social agenda (Boyd 230).
After five years of persistent and ongoing outreach, the Pedagogical Missions came to a screeching halt. The conservatives in Parliament began to fear the social transformations coming about as a result of the Missions, especially after the 1934 uprising in Asturias which many blamed on the newfound social awareness created through rural education (Brenan 284). The increasingly conservative government terminated all support for the Missions in 1935, reverting back to strong religious and militaristic ideals (Tiana Ferrer 188). Some missionaries attempted to continue the efforts through the end of 1935 regardless of Cossío’s death in January of 1935, but mayors would not receive them and the lack of national support squelched all prior enthusiasm. In an article written by Américo Castro regarding this discontinuation of the Pedagogical Missions, he critiqued the increasingly less progressive mindset of the government, claiming that it began to block the road that the Republic had just recently opened: “it is as criminal and senseless to annihilate the Educational Missions as it is to destroy the library in Oviedo or smash the treasures in its cathedral” (Castro 2). According to Castro, the government was now saying that, “apparently, taking Spanish ideas and culture to the countryside and villages is a mortal sin” (Sicroff 112). If the end of the Missions could trigger such kickback on the part of its supporters, was it a success? What impact did the movement truly have on the nation?

On paper, Cossío’s project had been the beginning of a success. The Missions had successfully decreased the illiteracy rate by 20% during the time they scoured the countryside (Ortiz 76). About a quarter of the population, however, remained illiterate. Many critics believe that the decrease in illiteracy is the only reportable outcome of the Missions, due to their short-lived presence in the country, but even so an insignificant outcome. Questions still remain: Would the illiteracy rate have continued dropping had Cossío and his missionaries been in effect longer? Was the newfound cultural boom and excitement about a shared culture sustainable? An
interruption such as the Civil War merits its dissipation, but would it have dissipated without a Civil War and dictatorship? At what point would the teachers in the countryside be self-sufficient? Could the practice of popular education have been adopted within the urban school system? This last question is perhaps the most intriguing and one of the most overlooked triumphs of the Missions.

Cossío and the group of intellectuals backing him on the Board of Trustees started with very little inspiration, example, or instruction. The final product that Cossío and his team developed, tested, and promoted is considered by many as an “original initiative in popular education” (Tiana Ferrer 191). Instead of sending teachers and missionaries out into the provinces and villages with lesson packets in tow so as to provide local children with lectures and lessons, the Pedagogical Missions developed a system that brought books to communities in order to develop intrinsic literate tendencies, encouraged teachers to cooperate with other organizations and their students in a collaborative, active and engaged manner, promoted active learning instead of rote memorization, and created a symbolic appreciation for shared Spanish art and culture (Garrido 158; Otero Urtaza 216; Tiana Ferrer 192). For the first time, the Spanish public received an education regardless of their status, class, or identity as a “subaltern”\(^5\). Deemed the first attempt at social, political and cultural integration of the masses in what Cossío would call an “anti-pedagogical”\(^6\) form, the Pedagogical Missions valued local knowledge and students of various backgrounds, social classes, and levels of education (Guereña & Tiana Ferrer 161). Most of the success enjoyed by the Missions during those five years is attributed to this unique style of inclusive, active, nonhierarchical learning. The Pedagogical Missions became the starting point

\[^6\] Antipedagogical in the sense that it broke all other models at the time in the field of pedagogy, see Cossío.
for Spanish popular education, as many teachers, especially those that were missionaries, opted to include hints of popular education in their post-Civil War lesson plans when able under the dictatorship’s watchful eye (Tiana Ferrer 193). Thus the pedagogy, or anti-pedagogy, yielded through popular education is a result of the Missions that continues to permeate through Spanish education still today, sometimes in the shadows and sometimes as a form of modification to the traditional system.

The overlooked triumph of popular education and the discredited triumph of decreasing illiteracy during the time of the Pedagogical Missions are understandable, given their placement in Spain’s political timeline. While the Patronage set out to establish “una educación laica”, or a secular education, free from the ideals of the Catholic Church and the upper class mindset, they did not successfully eliminate political or nationalistic thought from their teachings (Fernández Soria 339; Perello 178). Given Giner de los Ríos and Cossío’s Krausist7 tendencies, the Free Institute for Education, the Pedagogical Missions, and a large majority of teaching materials disseminated during the Second Republic were grounded in anarchist and socialist ideals. Through the deconstruction of social privilege in the upper class, equal ownership over national cultural production was created. In doing so, scholars such as Fernández Soria (331) argue that the Second Republic not only sought educational reform but educational revolution through the promotion of socialism and the education of the masses. While not an inherent or explicit goal of the Missions at their onset, the socialist movement within the initiative began to grow during the rise of fascism. Under General Franco, libraries and museums were bombed and burned, forcing the missionaries and Patronage to take action. A special and somewhat clandestine “Cultural Junta” was created

during the Civil War for the sole purpose of gathering and protecting cultural artefacts from the country, pulling back much of the resources distributed in the travelling libraries and museums (Fernández Soria 339). The Junta also became heavily involved in distributing propaganda in the hopes of keeping the Missions alive; posters read: “El pueblo en defensa de la cultura” o “Con libros y cultura derrotaremos al fascismo”/ “The countryside in defense of culture” or “With books and culture we will defeat fascism” (Perello 175). Thus an originally ‘apolitical’ action quickly turned political. These ties to anarchism and socialism became the ultimate warrant for the Missions’ extermination after the victory of fascism during the Civil War. Successes of the program therefore became overshadowed by the fascists’ attempts to vilify the democratic ideals and beliefs.

Political alignments aside, the democratic “agenda” enacted through the reform seen during the Pedagogical Missions can also be touted as responsible for both the movement’s success and its downfall. By creating a literate countryside population through the implementation of popular education and various modes of cultural production, Cossío manages to design a movement that also promotes citizenship through what Afinoguénova (262) deems “agrarian reform”. For the first time in Spanish history, the peasants of the countryside were addressed as citizens and the missionaries that flocked to these villages were the largest group of Spanish urbanites to ever address this citizenship (Holguin 65). Addressing the peasants as equals allowed for the construction of a shared community, identity, and citizenship now between the villages and the cities. This construction was by no means an accident. A vital part of the discourse used to describe the educational reform taking place in the countryside included terms such as: “ciudadanía consciente”/ “conscious citizenship”, “educación intelectual y cívica”/ “intellectual and civic education” (Álvarez Junco 25). As mentioned, a part of the Missions included the readings of
rights, the Constitution itself, and descriptions of pertinent laws. Through this active engagement with the newly formed democratic Republic, the villagers had actively engaged in the national identity and government on a basic level through interactions with the Missionaries. Children in these rural towns at the time did not directly benefit from the “citizenship presentations”. They did, however, receive primers such as *El niño republicano* that not only served as useful teaching aids in the classroom or reading materials, but as a means to inculcate youth in the Republican mindset (Séro Sabate 114). Materials and presentations such as these not only connected the villagers to urban affairs but included them in urban affairs. This inclusion and active participation creates an important popular movement at the national level that can be understood from two perspectives: that of John Dewey and that of Michel Foucault.

According to John Dewey, citizenship and democratic citizenship evolve through education, and not with the sole purpose of preparing those being educated for the future but rather with the added purpose of calling on those being educated to actively engage with those around them and to recognize their shared experiences (Heater 107). The Deweyian belief that citizenship can be acquired through education directly mirrors goals outlined by those involved with the Pedagogical Missions. The FIE itself outlined that it does not teach character, but citizenship because citizenship and belonging directly translate into the construction of character (Pozo Andres 110). By pairing the “republican primers” and “citizenship speeches” with cultural materials such as novels and movies, the Missionaries blended what it means to be member of a democratic republic with what it means to be Spanish and what it means to be an educated citizen. This all contributed to strengthening a national identity. Foucault can also help us understand how the Missions achieved this through his “studies of governmentality”. Culture, viewed as a ‘soft vehicle of power’, can engage communities in such a way that they are empowered and even
inclined to improve themselves (Foucault 169; Afinoguénova 284). Therefore, the pairing in the case of the Missions is essential to creating a nationalist ideal, providing villagers with the knowledge necessary to engage with the Spanish Republic and then the confidence and inclinations towards self-improvement to actually do so. The literacy movement therefore created active citizens. This byproduct, or even intentional product, would merit a “success” according to the ideals of the Second Republic. This becomes a threat during the Civil War as General Franco strives to concentrate power in the cities so as to gain control of the country, placing a target on the back of the democratic Spanish identity and in turn the Pedagogical Missions.

Manuel Azaña, the last President of the Second Republic, once said: *Si a quien se le da el voto no se le da la escuela, padece una estafa. La democracia es fundamentalmente un avivador de la cultura.* / If you are given a vote without being given an education, you are suffering a scam. Democracy is fundamentally a livening of culture. (Azaña 555). Education and the acquisition of cultural appreciation or knowledge, therefore, are inherently political actions. In the case of the Pedagogical Missions, Missionaries not only act on behalf of literacy and agrarian reform, but on behalf of socialist, anarchist, and republican ideals and Spanish democratic identity. This is perhaps the greatest critique of the movement and the source of its finest successes or fatal downfalls, depending on your political affiliations after 1936 in Spain. The Missions created the possibility for popular education in Spain and a newfound recognition of all Spaniards, villagers and urbanites alike. They also prompted recognition of the gaping hole in Spanish society that was its illiteracy rates. While the Missions are deemed “too short” to be significantly impactful or fully evaluated regarding illiteracy rates, they certainly managed to promote the use of and appreciation for literature in daily lives regardless of social class (Afinoguénova 286; Tiana Ferrer 180). Illiteracy rates were reported to have decreased during this time, but scholars continue to wonder
whether or not full literacy could have been obtained through the sustained implementation of Cossío’s project that he had developed from scratch.

**Conclusion**

The Pedagogical Missions, a landmark movement in Spain during the 1900s, developed organically in a century filled with literacy movements across the globe. With little inspiration from other countries or other movements, Cossío was forced to think on his feet and create a new pedagogy regarding mass literacy. The following chapters will outline two other movements in the Spanish speaking world which developed independently from the Spanish Missions: The Cuban Literacy Movement and the Nicaraguan Sandinista Literacy Crusades.
Chapter 2: CUBA

Cuba: El Año de la Educación

(1961)

*Revolution and education are the same thing. - Fidel Castro*

*I think the Cubans have an obsession... The obsession is education. At the rate they are going they will have a school and a teacher for every person.* - Teacher at the Pedagogía 86 International Congress in Havana (Cited by Marvin Leiner)

Introduction

The history of Cuba is one dictated by economic enterprise and colonial rule. During its history from 1492 to 1959, education was more or less a “back burner” issue. While Spain itself maintains a long history of educational reform and targeted cultural movements, as an imperial caudillo it neglected to implement the same concern for the education of its colonized populations, the Cuban people included. Expensive, private, parochial schools were the norm on the Cuban island until 1898. Then, the United States, asserting its newfound international clout, decided it knew what was best for the island nation. With respect to education, the United States decided to import poorly translated history books and primers from its own national curricula. At the dawn of the Revolution, approximately 42% of the Cuban population was illiterate (Torres 113).

Through a shared understanding of emergent socialism and Marxism, the revolutionary leaders, Che Guevara and Fidel Castro, concluded that in order to overthrow an oppressive Batista dictatorship and to promote a successful revolution among the Cuban people, it was necessary to

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8 Caudillo: a military or political force or leader
first educate the people - as Spanish Imperialism and United States Paternalism had clearly failed to do so. In creating a literate population, Guevara and Castro hoped to also create a politically, and socially, conscious population. After a year of intense and well-developed (pedagogically speaking) literacy work, the National Literacy Campaign of 1961 managed to completely eradicate illiteracy. In 1964, UNESCO declared Cuba a 100% literate nation. Cuba presents a unique example, however, as one of the very few nations to maintain complete literacy, even today after more than fifty years. The continued emphasis placed on education has become characterized as an obsession on the part of the Cubans: an obsession to keep spending a large percentage of the annual budget on education and reform, an obsession to keep promoting literacy both at home and abroad, and an obsession to maintain the practice of popular and continued adult education.

Pre-Revolutionary Cuba: Nearly Non-existent Education

In 1492, Cuba represented the European’s first introduction to the “New World”. As one of the first Caribbean islands explored by Christopher Columbus, Diego Velasquez, and Hernan Cortes, Cuba maintains the longest running history in the Americas, from the European perspective of course. The island’s tropical climate, ideal port location, and ease of access by boat, set it up as one of the most valuable imperialist colonial strongholds of the Spanish monarchy. While the Spanish government commissioned the initial voyages of the 1490s that would help conquistadors identify Cuba as a valuable land hold, the conquistadors were eventually given the luxury of self-government over the next several decades as Spain found itself absorbed in the Reconquista and other politically draining endeavors (Simons xiv). Under conquistador control, Colonial Cuba quickly became not only the “key to the New World” but also the “pearl of the Caribbean”, coveted by Spanish, French, and Dutch alike for its booming sugar plantation-based economy (Staten 18).
By the 1600s, sugar mills covered the small island. The need for labor beyond the indigenous Taino and Ciboney populations called for the import of several hundred thousand African slaves (Simons 67). Dependent on slave labor that would carry Cuba through both the sugar and coffee plantation “booms,” and the large influx of African peoples quickly changed the racial and class dynamics on the island; as now more than forty per cent of the population was characterized as a laboring “black” or “mulatto” (Simons xvi). Because of Spain’s economic dependency on the island, any struggles that subsequently arose between the minority, landholding *peninsulares* and creoles (people of Spanish descent), and the majority, working class blacks and mulattoes, were quickly repressed. Divisions in class structure widened with each decade, it seemed, and Spain showed no signs of relinquishing its colonial grip.

The Spanish colonial reign did finally come to an end, however, after more than 400 years of control when the Cuban War for Independence led to Cuban victory in 1898. The War for Independence started in 1868 when Carlos Manuel de Cespedes issued his *Grito de Yara* and freed the slaves then working on his sugar plantation so that they too could join his rebel army. The upper class creoles who quickly followed suit and joined in de Cespedes’ cause cited “the inability of Cuban creoles to serve in their own government, excessive taxation, corruption, the lack of religious liberties, suppression of the press and the denial of the rights of petition and assembly” as reasons for the revolt against Spain (Staten 24). During the thirty years of conflict, national independence became synonymous with national identity, which included a call for racial equality and racial unity not yet seen on the American continent (Chomsky 19). Rebel uprisings encountered their fair share of defeat and victory over the three decades of fighting. The prolonged experience, however, only benefitted the Cuban fight in the end. As revolutionary parties were given the space to develop themselves around battle cries, Cuban identity was allowed to form in
its opposition to a “definitional other” (Spain) and national heroes emerged to strengthen the cause. One such hero was Jose Marti, the Cuban intellectual and writer who would one day enjoy fame equaling that of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara (Simons 20). Marti, in 1873, sent the following note to Cuban leadership in order to promote a final push towards independence:

Fatherland is something more than oppression... Fatherland means a community of interests, unity of tradition, unity of goals, the sweetest and most consoling fusion of loves and hopes… Cubans do not live as Spaniards live… They are nourished by a different system of happiness through quite contrary customs. There are no common aspirations or identical goals linking the two peoples, or beloved memories to unite them (Marti 93).

With this final infusion of Cuban unity and spirit, Cuban rebellions pressed on long enough for history and politics to run their course in Spain. Just as the Cubans would make one final push, the First Spanish Republic crumbled and Spain could no longer hold on to its last remaining colony (Simons 64). War left the Cuban economy and government in shambles, however, and when independence was finally obtained it was quickly lost to an international power that was on a mission to fulfill its “Manifest Destiny”.

From 1898 to 1902, United States Commander in Chief, President McKinley, ordered military occupation on the island of Cuba, a protectorate highly sought after as the next jewel in the U.S. treasure chest. Under foreign military control, “Cuban politics remained hostage to the United States [and] U.S. companies and investors took control of the major sectors of Cuba’s economy” (Chomsky 38). United States enterprise quickly introduced capitalism to the island and left behind a trail of hegemonic control. When the government recognized that it was both difficult and impractical occupy and impose a governmental regime on the island through annexation, U.S. Congress decided that instead it could control the Cuban sovereignty through policy, one that had
all of the familiar undertones once presented in the Monroe Doctrine. Thus, in 1901 the Platt Amendment was proposed and passed into being as a part of the new Cuban Constitution in exchange for the removal of the U.S. military occupation from the island (Pérez 34). Reminiscent of the Monroe Doctrine and U.S foreign policy of “partnering through control”, the Platt Amendment signified the start of United States interference, political agendas, and economic meddling for the first half of the 20th century.

Within the constraints of the Platt Amendment, Cuba struggled to regain the national momentum sustained at the close of the War for Independence. As U.S. troops ended the Cuban occupation in 1904, the new Liberal parties felt hopeful in the prospects of developing the independent Cuba that had been in the making since 1868. However, the U.S. quickly returned in 1906 as President Theodore Roosevelt determined that the Cuban government was incapable of governing itself after a faulty election and immediately sent 2,000 U.S. Marines (Staten 2003). Liberal leaders came and went for the next twenty years under tight U.S. jurisdiction, as the U.S. constantly intervened with elections and subsequent policy making. In 1925, the Cuban people looked to Gerardo Machado as a source of hope, as he promised to end the Platt Amendment (Sweig 18). However, Machado quickly revealed just how corrupt his initial reformist tendencies were and dissent among Cubans mounted. In 1933 the U.S. government under Franklin Delano Roosevelt found itself practicing less interventionism than before and decided to broker a deal to repeal the Platt Amendment in exchange for a transfer of power away from Machado in the Cuban government (Sweig 13). The U.S. appointed, stand-in government did not last long and Fulgencio Batista quickly took an active role in government happenings that soon lead to his ultimate usurpation of national control through a U.S.-backed military dictatorship (Pérez 38). At the same time, various political groups, including those in favor of socialist and communist ideals, began to
sprout all over the Cuban countryside; these groups would initially contest Batista until he decided that it was in their mutual interests to strive for reform together (Staten 40; Chomsky 31). Throughout his dictatorship, Batista was busy collaborating with the U.S. government and the new Cuban economy quickly fell to ruin: 43% of the nation’s wealth was held by the 900,000 wealthiest, 1.5 million campesinos were jobless, homeless, and starving, 3.5 million struggled to make ends meet, the cost of living surged as Cuba became dependent on US imports, and Cuban wages were at an all-time low (Chomsky 34). Batista, by the late 1950s, was “rich and corrupt - and thus well regarded by US policy makers”, however the economic ruin and a sharp deviation from reform that he had once championed during his dictatorship led to dissent among his once allied communist and socialist contemporaries, who for the past two decades had begun developing their own lower class support (Simons 31). The role and rule of Batista as an “international puppet” are said to have ushered in the movement towards revolution that was beginning to develop in the countryside among the politically-silenced and alienated communists (Simons 40). Revolution was imminent.

As Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, two communist revolutionaries, entered the scene of Cuban politics in opposition of Batista during the late 1950s, so, finally, did literacy and education. Over the course of the preceding 500 years, Cuba had little time and few resources to devote any significant contributions to national education. The history of education that accompanies the era of Spanish Colonialism and United States Interventionism is a lacking history. Engulfed by economic and military strategic concerns, the Cuban government never had the time and resources necessary to establish an education system of merit. Preliminary laws were passed in 1842 and 1880 that would establish free, public and compulsory private education to the island. Resource scarcity, racial disparity, and parochial inequality made it nearly impossible to provide sufficient
education to children in the countryside and even in urban centers (Epstein 3). The disparate and lacking history therefore led to a momentous literacy movement that became a part of the revolutionary battle cry in 1961 and in essence the first Cuban attempt at educational legislation in its entire history.

**Seeds of Revolution and Education**

At the end of the 18th century, Cuba enters a transitory period between colonialism and independence. For the first time in Cuban history we see the emergence of two primary ideals: nationalism and modernization. After centuries of intermixing, the Spanish and African cultures brought to the island blended to form the “criollo” or creole identity. Cuban nationalism officially began to emerge at this time due to the creole alignment with a Cuban identity over a Spanish one. At the same time, Cuba bears witness to the industrial revolution in England (1760), the French revolution (1789), the United States Revolution (1776), and the Haitian revolution (1791), all of which contribute to a “new awakening of economic, intellectual, social, and political growth” (Bernal 223). Given the ideological inspiration for revolution from its once colonial counterparts, Cuban nationalism was strengthened. The fall of the Haitian coffee and sugar industries as a result of their revolution, set the stage for a Cuban economic surge (Fraginals 1). No longer defined by an identity dependent on its colonial virtues under the Spanish crown, Cuba was given the opportunity to modernize and revitalize the growing island nation. The time is described as “*un despertar de conciencia, la amplitud de pensamiento y cultura, y las pretensiones de libertad física y mental además del crecimiento de la población cubana debido al movimiento migratorio, que aun bajo una fuerte explotación, resultó esencial para el desarrollo de Cuba*” An awakening of consciousness, breadth of thought and culture, and the pretensions of physical and mental freedom
as well as the growth of the Cuban population due to the migratory movement which, even under heavy exploitation, was essential for the development of Cuba” (Céspedes Acuña 3).

By way of what some scholars deem “historical necessity” at the time, Jose Agustin Caballero emerges as the primary initiator of Cuban philosophical and pedagogical reform. From a philosophical perspective, Caballero is touted as the first Cuban intellectual to bring the ideas of Locke and Condillac to the island (Bernal 224). While this played a much more significant role in his theological and philosophical career, it was Caballero’s deep involvement in the theory of associationism as put forth by Condillac and Locke that led him to propose the pedagogical reforms that would kick start revolutionary ideals regarding education.

Cuban education at the time only reached a small minority of the population and was a privileged enterprise for those who could afford admittance to the primarily privatized system (Alarcón de Quesada 2). Therefore Caballero, by giving education a role of the highest order in his pursuits, advocated strongly for the development of a public school system. As a part of his proposal for the universal education for Cuban children, Caballero created a model for experience-based learning that would help children define and understand reality, inspired by the teachings of liberation theology (Bernal 224; Buch Sánchez 1; Céspedes Acuña 2). At the cornerstone of this model was an extra emphasis on the inclusion of art and science, topics previously excluded in the Catholic models imposed on the private school system. It did so in a way that fostered individuality

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9 On Locke and Condillac: “The philosophy of Etienne Bonnot de Condillac contains a theory of how the mind acquires self-control, freedom, and autonomy. This freedom is connected with the natural gestures and bodily expressions that constitute the basis for the development of a verbal language. On the one hand this constitutes a break with the theories of Descartes and Locke, who consider the mind as a free and pre-established entity existing prior to the reception of the first sense impressions. On the other hand his theories are an anticipation of Herder's break with the theory of language within «the way of ideas». Contrary to the idea-paradigm's theory that language has meaning by representing ideas existing in the mind prior to language, language has meaning by being bodily actions in social space.” See Aarslef (93).
and the selection of individualized lesson plans that would broaden knowledge bases that were significant and important to the learner in particular (Céspedes Acuña 3). This innovative approach to pedagogical thinking was the most radical ideological shift in Cuban education up until the 18th century. Cuba at the time, however, lacked the resources to enact any major reforms and the colonial subjugation of the island maintained the “strict canons of scholastic philosophy” as long as the majority of blacks and mestizos contributed to the slavery based economy (Alarcón de Quesada 1).

Two theological students, Felix Varela and Jose de la Luz y Caballero, who studied under Caballero, were inspired by this new way of conceiving of education and began to resume the work he started in the hopes of finally implementing a model. Together, these two pedagogical disciples expanded the work of Caballero in fundamental ways. Interested in sensory learning, Varela and Luz y Caballero developed sensory based education programs for primary and secondary school students, respectively, that emphasized the importance of experience and interaction with language above rote memorization (Bernal 224). Luz y Caballero devoted much of his time to the importance of language acquisition and models for teaching it after he left the seminary, disagreeing with traditional theological doctrines (Rodriguez 39). At the culmination of his career, Luz y Caballero founded the School of San Salvador in Havana as a means to implement and pilot Caballero’s, Varela’s, and his own educational models. Varela, working in conjunction with Luz y Caballero for a majority of his career, became not only a progressive pedagogist but a revolutionary in his own right. Philosophically speaking, Varela advocated for the continued implementation of the methods described by Locke and Condillac and expounded upon by Caballero (Varela 11). Varela discarded most traditional methods of education and concluded that experience, interest, and communication were the most valuable “educators” in life (Bernal 223). With strong political
tendencies, Varela intertwined his fight for educational reform with that for political reform, advocating for the liberation of the island nation from the grasp of imperial Spain; he recognized its hindrance not only for the progress in education, but for the country as a whole (Hernandez 73).

The dichotomy of education and revolution in the teachings of Varela earned him the retroactive title of Cuba’s “first revolutionary”. As he continued to work alongside of Luz y Caballero just before the final acquisition of Cuban independence, very few realized the tremendous importance education would play in the later revolution, despite Varela’s insistence on their interconnectedness (Hernandez 72). These new perspectives on pedagogy created the foundation for one of the world’s most successful education and literacy campaigns, Cuba did not recognize that there was still the looming imposition of U.S. foreign intervention after the island’s victory over Spain.

Immediately after the fall of Spanish colonial holds, the United States began its Cuban occupation under the leadership of General Leonard Wood. During his time in Cuba, Wood would not only serve as the key player in the implementation of the Platt Amendment but begin what is known as “US Paternalism” in the Cuban educational system (Sweig 23). In an effort to increase the deplorably low, forty percent enrollment rate among Cuban primary school aged children, Wood and his appointed Minister of Education quickly developed a rudimentary schooling model on the island that mirrored that of the United States (Epstein 14). As a part of this effort, the two “began to reorganize the education system based on the US public school model. Cuban teachers adopted US teaching methods and US textbooks were translated into Spanish and adopted by the schools, although no attempt was made to make them understandable within the Cuban culture and context” (Staten 21). In tandem with the influx of United States resources, primarily in the form of these textbooks and staple classroom materials, education officials trained teachers and enacted
compulsory enrollment (Epstein 19). By the numbers, efforts on the part of the United States were successful in achieving a much higher rate of enrollment, averaging 61% among all provinces by the mid-1920s, and by increasing the number of educational resources beyond the initial parochial private schools, relics of the Spanish system (Epstein 19). These successes, however, quickly failed for several reasons.

Despite the increase in student enrollment, which was initially promising, and due to the United States’ efforts, the initiative was socially flawed in ways that quickly created dissent among Cuban students. The increase in student attendance represented an increased recruitment directed towards Cuban peoples of Spanish ancestry. In accordance with the racial disparities fostered by structural deficits seen in the United States, the United States-created Cuban education system was exclusive and discriminatory (Epstein 14). Over the course of the decade following implementation of the new system, social and racial divides grew exponentially and had adverse effects with regard to enrollment, attendance, and literacy (Epstein 15). Additionally, while more students entered the classrooms, fewer left with sufficient understanding of the topics covered in class because the United States-based content created more questions than answers and the cultural divide in the materials proved ultimately detrimental to the coherence of lessons (Epstein 15; Staten 20). The United States at this time had transformed into an industrialized and urban lifestyle, one that was prominently displayed in the translated textbooks, yet Cuba remained a rural society rooted in colonial tradition. This, in conjunction with the disparate amount of shared history between the island and the continental nation, created nearly alien information in what “should have been” easily comprehensible primary readers (Epstein 16; Alarcón De Quesada 2). Finally, the boom of resources at the onset quickly dwindled and the initiative struggled to staff itself - “public education consisted of about 1,000 teachers in about 900 municipal schools serving a
school population of about 36,000 pupils” (Peréz 50). Short-staffed, culturally incompetent, and socially unjust, General Wood’s system created a setback for Cuban education nearly equivalent to the shortcomings of the Spanish system. As tensions over a lack of competent primary education grew, resistance blossomed in the universities filled with students who passed through the system prior to Wood. Universities quickly became breeding grounds for student movements against U.S. hegemony and corruption.

When Batista rose to power, with United States endorsement, all prior motivation to improve the quality of national education was abandoned and an offensive was mounted against any institutional resistance. Batista endorsed the privatization of schools that supported his efforts and dismantled the public education sector almost entirely, in addition to other various cultural institutions including the original university and the ballet (Alarcón de Quesada 2). The offensive taken on the part of the dictatorship did not last long because United States support was withdrawn from the island, the Platt Amendment was removed from the Cuban constitution, and revolution began to emerge from the countryside. Epstein summarizes the perils of US paternalism in Cuba as such:

[The initiative] worked superficially. It had the desired observable effect of attracting large numbers of aspiring pupils into the system and securing an ample corps of teachers in their service. But below the surface, troublesome fissures ran deep, contained only by the fragile presence of American power and resources. Democracy in education belied the persistence of a colonial social structure which the Americans themselves unwittingly sustained, by their use of force to prevent the dispossessed to rebel effectively against the tyrannical influence of the aristocracy… Educational democracy, with no roots in a
compatible social system, was destined to flounder in a sea of corruption and disenchantment. It proved to be a poor alternative to political revolution. (Epstein 15).

In an attempt to stave off political revolution, intervention on the part of the United States only created a stronger battle cry for the communist uprising that would soon erupt under Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. The explicit and large scale offensive against education on the part of Batista only made the importance of education and revolution as one unique entity more recognizable. And so, in an attempt to not only escape the economic and political hegemony but also the cultural hegemony, the Cuban Revolution began in 1959.

**Revolution**

The seeds of revolution on the Cuban island were planted nearly a decade before Castro and Guevara realized their ultimate victory in 1959. Batista rose to power, with support from the United States, while enemies of the state, including Fidel Castro who was a lawyer at the time, rose in opposition (Chomsky 19). Castro was widely known for his taste in “experimentation”. His experience in revolution across Latin America allowed him to participate in the overthrow of the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic and to protest the Gaftan assassination in Colombia. In combination with an in depth understanding of the texts and histories of communism and anarchism, these experiences helped Castro quickly enter the political stage as a revolutionary (Sweig 37). With nearly 200 co-conspirators by his side, including his brother Raúl, Castro mounted his first armed insurrection in late 1953 on the Moncada Barracks (Chomsky 36). The insurrection against the Batista government led to Castro’s apprehension as a subversive and a traitor, earning him a sentence of 15 years in prison. The communist party recognized Castro’s attack as a display of “adventurism guided by bourgeois misconceptions, lacking theoretical
cohesion and ideology” and as a movement that the party did not support. From jail, however, Castro admitted his involvement in the attack and penned his own defense papers to be presented to the court. One of his most celebrated papers concluded with: “Condemn me, it does not matter! History will absolve me” (Sweig 39). His words would not only capture the attention of the Batista court marshals, but the Cuban “campesinos” - the farmers, the everyday people, the middle and lower classes. By the end of 1955, these defense papers had won Castro sufficient popular support among the Cuban people that a second insurrection against Batista was quickly plotted from his station of exile in Mexico (Chomsky 20). Unphased by the first several years of failed attempts, Castro would return to Cuba with more force than ever.

While Castro plotted his return from Mexico, his name was becoming commonplace in Cuban households, but so too was that of his compatriot Ernesto “Che” Guevara. During his time away from the island, Castro developed a stronger tie to the Latin American revolutionary, Guevara, and realized how much their experiences and missions for freedom in Latin American aligned with one another. Guevara’s presence in the efforts of the Cuban Revolution would eventually reach mythic status and rightfully so given the importance of his contributions in the years following 1955. His involvement in revolutionary movements across South America brought an “air of internationalism” to the Cuban efforts, his personally modified idea regarding socialism brought an enlightened understanding to Castro’s sense of political affiliation, and his emphasis on the usefulness of guerrilla warfare brought a new dimension to later military efforts (Chomsky 41). Guerrilla warfare in particular proved vital during the two years following the duo’s return to island. As outright attacks on the government were quickly squelched, Castro depended on small forces of troops hidden in Sierra Maestra mountain range in order to encroach on the capital (Sweig 40). At the same time, “campesino” and student revolutionaries in the urban regions of the country
aided in the growth of the revolutionary movement, allowing Castro’s troops to pass through more easily once they came down from the mountains (Chomsky 40). The back and forth of military fire during those two years certainly placed a pressure on the Batista regime that would lead to Castro and Guevara’s ultimate victory over the dictatorship. What also emerged from this two year window, however, and is arguably an equally important result of their time in the mountains is the revolutionary discourse and agenda that the pair put together in case of victory.

Guevara in particular was highly conscious of the need for ideology and revolutionary discourse. At the time some emergent popular socialist and communist movements quickly adopted the quips of Soviet Russia, radical communist teachings, or pre-established anarchist or socialist regimes; Guevara paused for reflection quite often when defining the Cuban revolution, especially as the term “socialist” quickly linked itself to Castro’s efforts. Che’s legacy in Cuba lies in the fact that he advocated for a type of Communism that had not been reduced to simply economic reformation. Instead Guevara asserted that, “Communism is a phenomenon of consciousness, a means of overcoming alienation, of creating a ‘new man’” (Chomsky 47). In a letter to Castro, he wrote: “I am not interested in dry economic socialism… We are fighting against misery, but we are also fighting against alienation… Marx was preoccupied both with economic factors and with their repercussions on the human spirit. If communism isn’t interested in this too, it may be a method of distributing goods, but it will never be a revolutionary way of life” (Silverman 5). It was hesitancy on the part of Guevara, which led the Cuban Revolution to develop into a communist movement instead of automatically rising as one. In the search for the *hombre nuevo* or “new man”, free from alienation and the social tyranny of before, Guevara helped to create the idea of the New Left, an idea which aided in Castro’s final definition of Cuba as a communist state (Chomsky 48). The Revolution became a mission to redefine socialism while at
the same time right the social inequities that had ravaged the island for centuries. As a part of this search for the “new man”’s freedom, education rose to the forefront.

While Guevara found himself questioning the role and definition of socialism, he developed a profound appreciation for pedagogy and education. Guevara, a highly educated man by nature of pursuing medicine before his revolutionary days, recognized the importance of racial, social, and political diversity in the classroom - an insight derived from the juxtaposition of his time in the Argentine public school system and the isolated home school system once he fell ill with asthma (McLaren 58). The collective atmosphere established through diverse exposure could also eliminate the detrimental “individualism” that emerges in education, for every interaction, especially a revolution, is a social one. Thus, Guevara asserted that moving from individualism to self-capacity and self-learning in the context of a greater social environment would not only strengthen and expand the educational system itself, but also the country and the Revolution (McLaren 72). Convinced of the importance of self-capacity and classroom diversity, in addition to learning from example, learning from experience, and learning from history, Guevara established one of the earlier forms of critical pedagogy based in historical materialism and Marxism (McLaren 44). As an alternative system, critical pedagogy “is a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society and nation state” (McLaren 47; Giroux 51). Most importantly, this form of pedagogy recognizes students as cultural workers and transformative intellectuals that are capable of “identifying and redressing the injustices, inequalities, and myths of an often oppressive world” (Giroux 9; Freire 208; Gruenewald 4). While the guerrillas stationed themselves in the Sierra Maestra, Guevara began holding literacy lessons in which he employed his developing
pedagogical framework. In teaching the guerrillas literacy through the use of reading comprehension, the value of student experience and student-teacher exchange became apparent (McLaren 73). These literacy efforts also permitted Guevara to understand the extent to which the country’s previous leadership had failed the countryside in providing public education. In conjunction with his pedagogical tendencies, this realization sparked Guevara’s secondary goal of educational reform during the Revolution.

Revolutionary projects, according to Castro and Guevara, were not “limited by a lack of human resources so much as limited by the difficulty of mobilizing and utilizing the population at large and the resources of mass organization… post-revolutionary Cuba [therefore] centered itself on mobilizing the entire population into productive activities” (Torres 113). Thus, when the two entered Havana triumphantly in January of 1959 and declared the importance of education in achieving their desired political and economic transformation, Guevara already knew the form social education would assume in an effort to reintroduce the disenfranchised rural Cubans into society. The literacy movement that ensued is one of the world’s most momentous, if not underappreciated, social achievements.

**The Year of Education**

On New Year's Eve, 1960, Fidel Castro, now a year into his revolutionary presidency, publicly announced that by that same time next year Cuba would have eradicated illiteracy completely. As if his declaration to the Cuban people alone was not enough to ensure his confidence in the endeavor, Castro went as far as to publicly announce his lofty goal on the floor of the United Nation’s General Assembly, audaciously making it quite clear that “Cuba will be the first country of America which, after a few months, will be able to say it does not have one single
One may have doubted that Castro expected a city flooded with people waving banners that declared Cuba 100% literate 11 months after the start of the campaign, or whether or not he anticipated to have a mailbox flooded with “Thank You” letters proving that the campaign had made literate nearly 1,000,000 people, but no one could doubt his complete faith and confidence in both the Cuban people and the proposed movement.

Why was there such an urgency on the part of Castro to make Cuba a literate nation? Aside from the fact that Castro emerged from the Sierra Maestra after years of witnessing his compatriot, Guevara, champion the power and influence of education and literacy, under the guises of a thoughtfully constructed pedagogy, the social situation he inherited in his presidency was not only dire, it was declining. During the years of U.S. “Paternalism”, the inflated enrollment rates had painted a picture of growing educational success. With the fall of Batista, so too fell the facade of an improving educational system (Epstein 14). The Cuba of 1959, according to a census conducted throughout the countryside, identified illiteracy rates as high as 12.6% in the urban centers and a staggering 41.7% in more rural zones, totaling to nearly 1,000,000 illiterates (Prieto Morales 33). The only problem with this figure, is that it reports “complete illiteracy”. At the time, the public school system was in such disrepair that only one third of the adult population had any formal education, and even then the educational attainment plateaued around a third grade level (Prieto Morales 34). Furthermore, educational policies enacted under Batista created a social mobility bottleneck of sorts that allowed only a small fraction (just about 3%) of people to complete higher education and specialize in more advanced fields (Torres 113). Because of these extreme class inequalities, the lack of self-capacity, and the reproduction of economic downfalls that were only promulgated through the disparate national education system, Castro knew that if any of his

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10 Castro’s Speech to the UN 1960
revolutionary goals of creating a free, independent, and thriving Cuba were to be achieved, education would have to be at the forefront of his agenda (Bowles 478; Leiner 173; Mtonga 384). Additionally, if Castro were to remain consistent with the socialist underpinnings of his revolution, the process would have to be inclusive (McLaren 75). Educating the elite or select factions of the population, therefore, was not an option. And so, with great urgency, for the purpose of righting the great educational wrong that had left Cuba in disarray for centuries and for the purpose of moving forward with his agenda, Castro mounted the Literacy Campaign of 1961.

The first phase of the campaign included preparation and development. During the early months of 1961, the campaign was stationed an hour due east of Havana, in Varadero. Here campaign leaders and officials began preparing the necessary materials and would later train the *brigadistas*, or “brigaders” (the term used for literacy teachers that would go into the field) (Leiner 177). As calls went out across the country to find brigadistas - being sent out over television commercials, radio announcements, and newspaper ads - the Ministry of Education, charged with leading the campaign began to compile lessons and teaching materials that aligned with the pedagogical goals outlined by Castro with the help of Guevara. After intense vetting and thorough piloting, two primary texts emerged from the center at Varadero: teacher manuals titled *Alfabeticemos (Let’s Teach Them How to Read and Write)*11 and student textbooks bearing the campaign’s slogan, *Venceremos (We Will Conquer)*12 (Anderson 413). An official from the

11 Complete list of sections: The Revolution; Fidel is Our Leader; The Land is Ours; The Cooperative Farms; The Right to Housing; Cuba Had Riches and Was Poor; Nationalization; Industrialization; The Revolution Converts Army Barracks into Schools; Racial Discrimination; Friends and Enemies; Imperialism; International Trade; War and Peace; International Unity; Democracy; Workers and Farmers; The People, United and Alert; Freedom of Religion; Health; Popular Recreation; The Abolition of Illiteracy; The Revolution Wins All the Battles; and The Declaration of Havana
12 Complete list of sections: OEA (Organization of American States); INRA (National Institute of Agrarian Reform); The Cooperative Farm under the Agrarian Reform; The Land; Cuban Fishermen; The People’s Store; Every Cuban; A Home Owner; A Healthy People in a Free Cuba; INIT (National Institute of Tourism); The Militia; The Revolution Wins All the Battles; The People at Work; Cuba is Not Alone; The Year of Education; and Poetry and the Alphabet.
ministry described the manual and primer as filled with “content and method that were in harmony”, blending a didactic approach that not only introduced the grammar lessons necessary to achieve literacy but also presented lessons about Cuba, the new government, and revolution in order to reflect the reality in which illiterates were becoming literate (Prieto Morales 36; Kozol 345). Because those in charge of the campaign felt that this information and these materials were vital to the success of the student, the movement, and the country, over 1.5 million copies of the primer were printed (Kozol 346). No expense was spared when it came to the campaign.

Primer sections such as “The Cooperative Farm under Agrarian Reform” and “Poetry and the Alphabet” presented alongside one another in the same compendium demonstrated the Campaign’s three prong approach emphasizing literacy skills, political knowledge, and cultural appreciation. In a similar fashion, each chapter in the primer followed a three prong methodology that the brigadista was encouraged to follow during each lesson: the global aspect, the analysis, and the synthesis. The global aspect presents students with a photograph intended to stimulate conversation between the brigadista and students. In this way, the brigadista ascertained information about the student’s relevant life experience and prior knowledge about the topic of the lesson. Then, the teacher invited the student to read the text printed in front of them as the teacher read aloud. This would be followed by the analysis, which included short phrases and keywords separate from the main text and able to be divided syllable by syllable in the hopes of emphasizing the lesson’s chosen syllable. Finally, the teacher walked students through the synthesis, as learned sounds were practiced aloud, phrases were dictated back to the teachers, and then the words or phrases were written in cursive (Leiner 182). Dr. Raúl Ferrer, one of the methodology’s intellectual contributors, outlined this lesson approach as such:

First Step: CONVERSATION
Conversation between the brigadista and the pupil in regard to the photograph within the primer:

(a) To find out what the pupil knows about the subject of the photo.

(b) To provoke oral expression.

(c) To clarify the concepts.

Second Step: READING

A complete reading of the text (block letters) that appears beside the photo:

(a) First, by the teacher: slowly and clearly.

(b) Second, by the teacher and the pupil at the same time.

(c) Third, by the pupil all alone . . .

Third Step: PRACTICE AND EXERCISE

(a) Sight-recognition of a phrase or sentence that has been selected (Key).

(b) Break-up of that phrase or sentence into syllables.

(c) Examination of each syllable within an exercise.13

The brigadista was then instructed to take down meticulous notes at the conclusion of the lesson in a diary provided to them. By doing so, the brigadista could record the student’s growth and note tactics that worked well or did not work well during the lesson, to perhaps share with other brigadistas (Kozol 351). In this way, the campaign developed a full set of course materials and methodologies, just as brigadistas began arriving in Varadero, ready to learn how to be an alfabetizador in the Cuban image.

Upon hearing the call for help over the airwaves, students and youth across the country mobilized in early April of 1961. More than 100,000 Cubans poured into Varadero in the hopes of

13 Interview with Ferrer by Kozol. Transcript given.
being trained as first and foremost a literacy teacher, but also as an informed, revolutionary Cuban citizen. But who in particular became a brigadista? The initial influx of volunteers were young men and women, who upon hearing Castro’s promise of “honesty, energy, health care for the poor, food for the hungry, and good schools for all” were all driven to volunteer their time in order to support the mission (Kozol 344). Many of these young adults possessed some experience teaching or had just completed their secondary education. On April 15th, 1961, a second, and equally large, wave of volunteers came flooding into Varadero and identified themselves as the “Conrado Benitez14 Student Brigade” (Leiner 184). This brigade force was one comprised entirely of students, as the National Literacy Commission had been ordered by Castro to close all schools for the remainder of the year if the students would then “take up arms” and assist with the campaign (Leiner 184). By the end of the recruitment period, the campaign had such sufficient brigadista staffing that it could promote the practice of 2:1 teaching, two illiterates to each brigadista. This ratio would later prove to be a powerfully symbolic aspect of the campaign as portrayals of this near one-on-one interaction would be depicted as a handshake on posters (with a white arm reaching out for a black arm) that emphasized the unity and integration of the country through the efforts of the campaign (Leiner 184). Now fully staffed, trained, and equipped, the campaign could begin sending 25 person “micro-brigades” out to the countryside.

The Literacy Commission recognized, however, that to send brigadistas out to the countryside with nothing more than a stack of primers would mean the imminent failure of the campaign. Sensitive to the situation many Cuban peasants found themselves in, the Commission

14 Conrado Benitez: “while working in a pilot literacy pro­gram. Benitez, a black man, eighteen years old at the time of his death, had been drawn into support of Fidel Castro in the very early years, in the hope that Fidel's revolution represented the first serious chance for abolition of racism in the Carib-bean. According to the Cuban government's display of evidence, Benitez was only one of many volunteers who have been assassinated by anti-Castro forces.” (Kozol 346).
decided to equip the volunteers with three things: a crash-course orientation to the countryside, a hammock, and a lantern. The orientation to the countryside proved invaluable as it prompted dialogue among brigadistas about the cultural, educational, and social aspirations of the Cuban *campesino* (farmworker, peasant). While one of the main goals of the campaign was “universalization of the university”, this goal would fall short of its true intentions if the brigadistas were unaware of the cultural needs of the rural populations and how these populations might interpret the outcome of this goal in a very different way (Bowles 490). This cultural and social consciousness on the part of the Commission was then physically accounted for and demonstrated with the supply of hammocks and the sophisticated multi-purpose Coleman lanterns.15 Because many rural homes could barely accommodate the families already living there, the Commission felt it would be too much to ask for the families to house the brigadistas in addition to welcoming them into their community. Finally, “the lantern was essential, not only to provide light by which to travel from house to house on the country roads, but also to provide light by which to carry on the lessons before sunrise, or after sunset, when the farmers and their families had assembled at the kitchen table to learn how to read and write” (Kozol 347). The lantern quickly became symbolic of the revolution as the farmers began referring to the brigadistas as “Las Lámparas”, or “The Lanterns”. Now, after all of this, the brigadistas could finally disperse.

The event that neither Castro nor the brigadistas had anticipated disrupting the literacy movement both shocked and encouraged the nation. Just as brigadistas prepared to attack the mounting threat of illiteracy, the United States had prepared to attack the mounting threat of Latin

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15 This distinction and emphasis is made because at the time kerosene lanterns were the norm in Cuba. By providing such a sophisticated piece of equipment, the government was making a bold expenditure and statement that proved their confidence in and support of the campaign’s mission.
American revolution. The Bay of Pigs Invasion\textsuperscript{16} was launched on April 15, 1961, by the Kennedy Administration in the United States and challenged Castro’s authority as a leader, demonstrating the United States’s disapproval of the events transpiring on the island (Gleijeses 3). In three days’ time, however, the United States experienced such series of miscommunications and mistimed steps that the Cuban military left the skirmish as the victor. (Gleijeses 5). Cuban victory in this military encounter with one of the most powerful foreign forces at the time became a symbolic moment for both the nation and the movement. Subsequent actions on the part of the government legitimized the revolutionary regime and recruited popular support\textsuperscript{17} (Fagen 268). As a result, part of the Cuban image was reconstructed into that of the militarized revolutionary that would fight to the death in order to protect the first Cuban government that was of and for the Cuban people; the famous rally cry, “¡Patria o muerte!”, emerges at this point. Both of these symbols come to represent not only the revolutionary mission, but the literacy movement itself when brigadistas began donning khaki, military-esque suits and cried out “¡Patria o muerte!” as they moved throughout the countryside (Fagen 270; Abendroth 81). This brief interruption and reconstruction of the identity of the brigadista as an extension of the Revolution forever altered the literacy campaign, cementing its place in Cuban history as the movement that maintained Cuba, post-invasion and post-embargo (Abendroth 7).

Throughout the months that ensued, the Literacy Commission kept a close watch over the brigadistas and the Cuban countryside. The census and progress reports were continually updated as the brigadistas identified new students, established new community footholds, and held classes at an increasing rate almost unceasingly (Leiner 187). Halfway through the campaign, Castro and

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\textsuperscript{16} See Kennedy Library archive for detailed history of the Invasion.  
\textsuperscript{17} This support would not last long, however, as tensions grew between Castro and some of Cuba’s elite (primarily exiles). See Fagen for more information.
the Literacy Commission held a National Literacy Congress in Havana. At the meeting, several representatives for the campaign spoke regarding the process and the progress of the initiative. To the dismay of Castro and other campaign leaders, the number of identified illiterates rose much more steadily than did the number of newly literates. Too many campesino students were stuck in the “in-between” designation of “learning” (Fagen 50). In an attempt to make one final push, Castro called upon all teachers and students who were not yet a part of the effort and trained them on the spot. A second primer was also developed in order to strengthen and reaffirm the messages transmitted through the original publication, in addition to accommodating the comments recorded by early brigadistas in their diaries (Fagen 51; Leiner 85). The movement became hyper-focused on reaching its goal, efficiently and thoroughly. Between October 1961 and December 21, 1961, the brigadistas succeeded in reaching those not yet encountering the movement and raised the count of “newly literates” from 354,000 to just over 1,000,000 (Leiner 185). Soon, census reports, Commission evaluations, and “thank you” letters18 poured into Havana… Castro had reached his goal in the nick of time.

Thousands of people flooded to the capital on December 22, 1961. In Havana’s Revolutionary Plaza a parade of brigadistas came holding banners reading: “¡Vencimos!”, “Cuba: Libre de Analfabetismo”, and “¡Cumplimos!” (Abendroth 86). Castro addressed the crowd, declaring the triumph of literacy: “No moment is more solemn and exciting, no instant full of legitimate pride and glory than this, in which four and a half centuries of ignorance have been defeated” (TeleSur 2016). With only about 3% of the entire Cuban population left to educate, Cuba had in essence eradicated illiteracy in the course of a year (Fagen 53). Two years later, UNESCO

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18 The final evaluation to test whether or not a student had become literate included a final test in which the student had to read a passage aloud, unaided, complete a brief dictation, and write a letter to Fidel Castro, proudly signing it at the end (Leiner 187).
would officially cite Cuba as being completely free of illiteracy after completing a one month mission to the country at Castro’s request in order to make his claim official (UNESCO 9). Almost two million Cubans had been involved, either as a student or teacher, with the campaign. The movement’s success, to them, was a momentous achievement and would propel them through the next fifty years of continued educational success and ongoing revolution. Each of these two million people will cite a different impact the movement had on them, some forever changed by interacting with their fellow countrymen in a way they had never experienced before and some motivated to leave farming entirely for loftier pursuits. “Success” is a word inherently associated with the Cuban Literacy Campaign. An interrogation of the outcomes of this “success” are necessary, however, to fully understand the impact, effects, and in some instances failures on the part of the revolutionary, and at times legendary, movement.

Outcomes

Forty years after the campaign, Christopher Worthman, a constructivist theorist, accompanied by a Cuban colleague visited Cuba for a conference. Over the course of their time on the island, they began to notice that Cubans possessed an “uncanny ability to name their condition and to explain why Cuba has turned out as it has” (Worthman & Kaplan 649). Rosario Garcia, one of the campaign’s early directors, explained to them later that they were experiencing “dialogic exchange”: a process learned in the school system for “interaction to lead to action… in the case of the literacy campaign, the purpose of action was to transform the country from a poor, totalitarian-ruled island to a socialist state” (Worthman & Kaplan 649). Intrigued by the revolutionary educational tendencies still ingrained in the society decades after the conclusion of the “great socialist overhaul” that was the campaign, Worthman and his colleague decided to
investigate the school system a little more. In doing so, they met Sylvia, a primary school teacher who had been teaching since the 1970s, and she agreed to let them observe one of her lessons. Worthman and Kaplan hid themselves in the back of Sylvia’s classroom, packed in with 30 young third grade students. The two watched on with amazement. Lesson plans continued to follow the outline so long ago established in the teaching manual *Alfabeticemos*, with perhaps even more social and experiential commentary from students than before and even longer accompaniment writing assignments (Worthman & Kaplan 651). Seemingly the Cuban revolutionary education system, overwhelmed by its original successes, had stuck to the old adage and decided not to fix what was not broken. Had the outcomes of the campaign truly superseded simply that of elevating literacy rates? Why after so many years is the campaign considered to be ongoing?

The Cuban Revolution is considered an ongoing project, one that did not simply end with the fall of Batista and the rise of Castro. No, the Cuban Revolution is viewed as a now 50 year project in the making. With social, political, and educational reform at the heart of this project, one could then conclude that these too remain ongoing endeavors. In fact, if we take Castro’s claim that, “Revolution and education are the same thing”, at face value, then for the Revolution to continue, so too must the campaign. And it seems that this would be a fair assessment. Today, Cuba continues to spend more on education per capita\(^\text{19}\) than most other countries and has remained free of illiteracy since 1961 (Gjelton 2000, NPR talk). The high retention rate of literacy skills among the Cuban population allowed for drastic improvements to be made in the realm of formal education. Soon, resources were directed not towards brigades but instead to schools. And

\(^{19}\) Like many other government programs, the education sector did see a decrease in spending during the “Special Period”, when Cuba lost the USSR as an ally and financial support. While the education sector did experience less significant funding, resources, staffing during this time, the country was able to return to its previous trajectory and continue this trend of high spending in the sector. For more information see “Farber, Samuel. *Cuba since the Revolution of 1959. 2011.*” *Cited*
at the end of the nineties “more than 97 percent of children between the ages of six and fourteen were enrolled in school, and retention rates in elementary, secondary, and vocational and technical school were over 95 percent” (Farber 77). As principles from the campaign were carried over into the new public school system, Castro guaranteed that the pedagogy so well established by Guevara and the Campaign Committee in 1961 would live on infinitely in the classroom (Kempf 11). The campaign brought a cultural shift in attitudes regarding education that forever changed the value of schooling in Cuban society. Today, educational reform clearly persists as one of the most triumphant outcomes of the 1961 initiative. There exist, however, alternative and at times unforeseen outcomes that have contributed to any critique of the campaign. Forever changed were the social, gender, and political relations of before.

To regard *every illiterate Cuban* as the target of this campaign, meant to disregard previously established racial and social barriers once present on the island. By the end of the Batista regime the Afro-cubans and working class were so polarized from the Spanish-cubans and upper class landowners, that one might think it impossible to create a fully unified Cuban identity (Serra 131). For decades, these racial and social separations had been promulgated by the pre-revolutionary education, as students would learn from historical wisdom embedded in primary reading passages that “(a) poor treatment of the enslaved was not an across the board practice, (b) poor treatment of the enslaved (rather than, suppose, good treatment of the enslaved) would be the only motivation for escape, (c) black people are murderers and robbers, (d) the agency of the enslaved was irrelevant beyond the exercise of criminal tendencies, and d) that black people, in the end, got what was coming to them” (Kempf 7). In fact, the system worked in both directions: enforcing these ideals among the white, upper class and preventing the Afro-Cubans from questioning the system. The segregated black schools maintained restricted curricula that
prohibited Afro-Cubans from learning history, grammar, geography and drawing (Bronfman 70). Centuries of colonial status and unequal education had left the country divided. However, Castro and Guevara recognized this and in their pursuit for the “New Man” decided that were the Revolution to succeed, it must account for and ameliorate this divide.

The Literacy Campaign provided the means to include, incorporate, and champion the “New Man”, irrespective of his or her social standing or race. Over 80% of those who became a brigadista or teacher in the years following the campaign were of working class origins (García 3). And of those educators, 30% were of black or mulatto heritage (de la Fuente 275). For the first time in Cuban history “working class people, people of colour, and women were positioned as knowers, possessors of the prized commodity of literacy and political enlightenment” and during the campaign it would not be uncommon to see “the phenomenon of middle-aged white male farmers taking direction (on reading instruction and political ideology) from 16 year old black women” (Kempf 5). The practice and new found familiarity within society of this social and racial intermixing, in conjunction with later educational desegregation, allowed the Cuban Revolution to blur the boundaries that had once existed. Guevara championed the use of example as the best teacher and it is clear that recruiting brigadistas and educating the illiterate with no concern for race or social standing was the highest example that the new regime could set at the time (McLaren 85). This example carried over into the feminist movement, which arguably became one in the same with the Revolution.

Cuba, like many of the 20th century Latin American countries, had developed a culture engulfed in the masculine ideals of machismo. As more than half of the brigadistas were female, though, the face of the literacy campaign inherently became the same face of a feminist movement (Herman 105). By the end of the campaign, 55% of the newly literate were female, creating an
overwhelmingly new sense of equality among the once uneducated and oppressed female population (Herman 107). Everyone involved with the campaign could feel the changing gender dynamics. One brigadista comments: “For girls, of course, the change was more remarkable: the traditional models for being a woman (subordinate to the masculine desires of fathers and husbands, confined to domestic spaces and chores)” were falling apart. Through trial and error and with practice, they began to construct other models nourished by their obvious ability to do things as equals with men, their strength and resistance in the most adverse circumstances, and their determination not to give up” (Murphy 7). Another concludes that: “For those of us who were women, it [the literacy movement] liberated us, because our entire generation of women gained a completely different view of life. The literacy campaign change the meaning of life for Cuban women” (Murphy 123). In 1966, Castro addressed the country and reflected on the unforeseen importance women played in the campaign. According to Castro, the Revolution became a feminist movement stronghold against these masculine ideals that permeated Cuban culture, and that the “phenomenon of women’s participation in the revolution was a revolution within the revolution… the revolution is occurring among the women of our country!” (Castro 49). And rightly so. Women donned the militarized uniforms of the brigadista that became the movement’s response to the Bay of Pigs Invasion. The once highly masculine endeavor of war and revolution in Cuba was inverted the moment women took up these uniforms, defied their fathers, and left for the countryside as they inadvertently masculinized education while they feminized the revolution (Herman 108). Machismo was by no means eradicated in 1961, however it had been turned on its head. Women redefined themselves as they rose to be man’s equal, and the Revolution embraced their battle cry

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20 Many women were disowned for initially joining the literacy campaign. Fathers in particular were upset with their daughters’ decision to leave home and trample across the countryside, especially after the Bay of Pigs Invasion struck fear into many - the threat of invasion or confrontation now present in their minds. See Maestra documentary.
as they fought for a literate Cuba. Redefinition became central to the revolutionary mission, not only among social and gender relations, but also in political relations. The government found itself changing just as much as the women and afro-cubans of the island.

Some theorists will argue that it was through the Literacy Campaign that the Cuban Revolution, and resulting government, redefined itself and became truly socialist. Jonathan Kozol asserts that the campaign is one of the major incidences that transformed Cubans into communists:

“Socialist conviction was not the major force that prompted so many thousands of young Cubans to spend nearly a year risking their lives, working like fanatics, living on little more than six hours of sleep in the same house and often in the same room as some of the poorest campesinos in the land. Socialism was not the major cause; it was, however, one of the most sweeping consequences” (344).

No, the Cuban Revolution was primarily motivated by the search for economic and social betterment of the country, using a framework devised by Castro and Guevara through experience and reading (Bowles 474). The objectives of the campaign, and the revolution, were generalized; they were viewed as a means to create equality, establish education’s priority, and release Cuba from imperialism (Kempf 4). At the onset of Castro’s regime, there was never any mention of socialist or communist theorists. One brigadista comments: “I did not know of Marx or Lenin at that time. I only knew about Fidel” (Kozol 377). Socialist and communist themes and discourse, modified to the specifications of Castro and Guevara, became commonplace among revolutionary leaders and commonplace Cubans alike, however (McLaren 83). It seems that these themes had emerged organically from the emphasized lessons in the primers and literacy lessons (Leiner 184). Without intending to be an outright socialist movement, the Literacy Campaign had made it so. Just exactly how this new association with socialism would play out in Cuba’s history, however,
is another story. What is important to note is how discourse distributed through the campaign became the mechanistic turning point that would allow the re-identification of “revolution” as “communism”.

Social, gender, and political relations are at the heart of the unforeseen outcomes of the Literacy Campaign. In addition to the educational reform that would persist over the next 50 years, these changing relations would serve as the example and model for the “New Man” of Cuba. The internal upheaval of colonial society as a result of the Literacy Campaign has forever changed the face of the island nation. Social reform, educational reform, and increased literacy rates, however, have not been the only outcome. In fact, one of the most astounding results of this initiative has been its impact on other countries. Initially a purely internal endeavor, the Cuban Literacy Campaign turned its gaze outward and went global. As a result, the program *Yo Sí Puedo* was conceived.

As early as 1976, Cuba, as a part of its international solidarity mission, sent representatives that had served in the 1961 Literacy Campaign to Angola, hoping to survey the literacy situation there. This exploratory trip became the first of several over the next twenty years (Boughton & Durnan 327). The surveys made evident the need for a global focus on adult literacy, inspiring Cuba to join forces with several other international literacy advocates in the hopes of creating a UNESCO backed global campaign (Bhola 19). All efforts were halted, however, when the World Bank announced that it could not fund nor support any global literacy effort made on the part of UNESCO (Jones 42). Cuba, despite these decisions, persisted. Within five years, Cuba established an infrastructure that sent a joint mission to countries in need, combining literacy with health outreach (Anderson 81). The literacy missions brought with them the newly developed *Yo Sí Puedo*, Cuba’s newest literacy primer that was designed for a general public. The primer considers
the theoretical and practical underpinnings that made the Cuban campaign the success that it was, and “although the Cuban model utilizes the same basic approach in each of the countries in which it has been deployed, there is also significant customisation to local conditions, including local languages” (Boughton 65). Lessons are also tailored to the local history and culture. Cuban teachers enter the country requesting literacy services, train new local teachers, and aid in piloting/initiating the campaign (Boughton 70). The Yo Sí Puedo model has now been distributed to several different countries and deemed a successful first step. Now, the countries must continue and follow up with the education reform necessary after the campaign in order to maintain and develop literacy skills within its citizenship (Boughton & Durnan 330). As we will see in the coming chapter, Yo Sí Puedo is young and therefore difficult to assess. Regardless, the premise of the program demonstrates the success, core tenets, and replicability a campaign such as Cuba’s can have both nationally and internationally.

**Lessons, Critiques, and Limitations**

The Cuban Literacy Campaign, an ongoing effort much like the Revolution itself, has remained the cornerstone for cultural and social development of the island nation. With the release of the 1964 UNESCO report, officially declaring Cuba’s triumph over illiteracy, Cuba cemented its role in global education. The success of the campaign is unequivocal, however there is one glaring, overarching critique, strengthened by several secondary critiques, which limits a declaration of “unbridled success” on the part of the campaign. In the the wake of the campaign, counter-revolutionaries were easily identifiable. Certainly, these counter-revolutionaries posed a threat to the brigadistas and the Revolutionary government as a whole. But many of these counter-revolutionaries, at least the non-violent ones, were pre-revolutionary educators. These educators,
not seeing the merits of the campaign, were left with no option but to flee into exile. Their commentary has served as the largest blemish on the face of the campaign, in addition to other smaller critiques. Considered together, the critiques of and take-away lessons from the campaign allow for a holistic understanding of the Cuban approach.

First, an understanding of the guiding tenets of the campaign. The Cuban literacy model can be condensed to five primary objectives or guiding principles. The most overwhelming quality is that of “egalitarian humanism” (Boughton & Durnan 64). Considering education as a liberating force, Castro ensured sufficient opportunities were provided to all Cubans so that they may realize their full human potential, to truly understand their own experience in the context of society. This egalitarian humanism directly aligns with Guevara’s sought after “New Man” (McLaren 74). The campaign also demonstrates the need for the backing of political will. Overwhelming support of the campaign on the part of the national government brought with it resources, national organizations, and intentionally appointed committees that could follow the campaign through completion. In assuring political will, the campaign would not stop under infrastructural constraints, unless so dictated by the government (Boughton & Durnan 65). Cuban education has also demonstrated the need for continuity post-campaign. Whether formal or informal, both adult and child education initiatives need to be taken up afterwards to expound upon the foundation laid during the campaign. Literacy is a continuum, and just as one can move forward, one can move backwards. Literacy is not automatically maintained generation to generation, either. Therefore, the Cuban system of education that succeeded the campaign has demonstrated that full national literacy is obtainable with ongoing support and attention (Boughton & Durnan 65). A campaign must also formally establish a pedagogy that not only accounts for teaching style but the attainment of spelling, grammar, and phonetics. The Cuban primers emphasize a “modified distance education
model utilizing an ‘analytic-synthetic’ pedagogy, in which words and phrases are broken down into component sounds and letters and then re-assembled. To facilitate the learning of the alphabet and the construction of words, each letter is associated with a number. This technique, which is called ‘alpha-numeric’, is based on an assumption that most non-literate or low literate people have some familiarity with numbers” (Boughton & Durnan 66; Boughton 340). While this is not definitively the best language acquisition model, it is defined, consistent, and theoretically based, something each campaign must take into consideration. Finally, the campaign demonstrates that full commitment and integration provide a positive influence for all involved with the effort. In other words, the campaign found a unity between the teachers and learners because the brigadistas lived and worked near the students. This provided a positive outcome as continuous and schedule sensitive lessons could be provided (Boughton & Durnan 66). In this way, the Cuban Literacy Campaign demonstrates a potential need for the following in a successful campaign: humanistic and inclusive considerations, political will and support, continued post-literacy efforts, a language acquisition based pedagogy, and a full integration of teachers and learners.

Under these tenets, the Campaign also demonstrated a series of key lessons. The most thorough and thought provoking lessons have been outlined in a UNESCO report on campaigns around the globe and have been widely agreed upon:

1. The most obvious lesson is that campaigns are not miracles; successful campaigns result from hard work, technique and organization. And these do not come together without the political will of the leadership.

2. Literacy campaigns cannot be justified in purely economic terms. Ideological justifications are necessary; quite often ideological justifications may even be sufficient.
3. While the availability of resources helps, further resources can be generated through mobilization of the people, if the political will, inspired by an ideology, exists. Closing the schools and sending young people to teach adult learners on farms and in the mountains was a masterly stroke which not only supplied the necessary manpower but also resulted in a campaign for those who taught—they experienced the rural culture, they learned socialism, they became the backbone of the socialist revolution.

4. Finally, literacy campaigns should be evaluated not merely in terms of people made literate but in terms of their effects in cultural, social and developmental terms (Bhola 105). There emerge two guiding themes from these lessons, that of political will/ideology and of cultural/social value. Political will is cited as the hard work and resources that supported the campaign. Because the government fully endorsed the campaign, schools could be closed, primers could be funded and made, students could be mobilized, and spending could be targeted. While at times contested, the concept of ideology, according to Raymond Williams (1977) the Marxist approach to this idea has come to encompass the theory of ideas, presupposed by a power structure or governing body, that take into consideration social experience in order to create meanings and values (Williams 70). Taking this into consideration, it becomes evident how ideology has been a contributing factor to the lessons obtained from the campaign. Spanish colonial and United States paternal social experiences in the Cuban government led to the swift creation of a new set of Cuban values and meanings, in order to distribute, legitimate, and propagate this ideology, the Cuban Literacy Campaign maintained a distinct set of discourses and dialogues in the lesson. Or, it could be viewed in the opposing direction: because Castro and the Literacy Commission could clearly articulate the meaning and value they hoped to establish in daily post-revolution Cuban life in the
primers, they constructed and internalized their defining ideology. Regardless, the theme of ideology and political will held tremendous sway over the outcome of the campaign.

Additionally, there is the emergence of the theme of cultural and social value - while this value system is highlighted in ideology, it stands distinctly separate enough in the lessons learned from the campaign that it should be considered separately. UNESCO cites that considering the social and cultural implications of a literacy campaign, over economic concerns, as influential in the outcome of the campaign. In accordance with Guevara’s assertions that socialism must be enacted in a manner that is much more than economic policy, this conclusion aligns with the stated goals of Guevara and Castro at the onset of the revolution (McLaren 84). By incorporating lessons on Cuban citizenship, the primers successfully integrate a system of values and a description of cultural norms that would be supported during the revolutionary regime. In addition to dispersing culture, the primers and the Campaign created a culture. As observed by Leiner (180), the Cubans have an “obsession” with education. Through the efforts mounted by the campaign, the revolutionary leadership succeeded in creating a culture that revolves around education and its importance. And so, UNESCO’s claim at the four lessons learned in Cuba is readily supported by examples set, ideals promoted, and practices enacted during the Campaign.

Aside from these tenets and lessons, the Cuban Literacy Campaign is also of critical importance, in two senses. The Campaign brings to the forefront the ideas of critical pedagogy, looking inward, and critical global citizenship, looking outward. Guevara’s self-constructed ideology emerges at the same time that Paulo Freire in Brazil begins to develop his own (McLaren 110). Critical pedagogy, as a formal establishment, did not truly exist until outlined in 1983 by Giroux. However, Giroux’s work draws heavily on examples such as Guevara’s, in which

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educators view the act of teaching as the way to create a radical change in social thought, informed by historical and political contexts, through the use of progressive educational methods in order to provide for the oppressed population (Darder & Torres 3). Critical pedagogy is considered to feed directly into the practice of popular education, as outlined by Freire, and has dominated Cuban social practice and thought. Abendroth comments that, “in socialist Cuba, popular education is a way of life that is fully supported by the government. Community organizing is not an activity for a few professionals and several dedicated volunteers but rather a process that seeks participation of all ordinary citizens as stakeholders” (137). The culture of active citizenship, as a result of critical pedagogy, internally within the country has also inspired an outward focus.

It has been said, with respect to this outward gaze on the part of Cuba that, “without a Cuba, there is no Venezuela; and without Venezuela, no Bolivia, no Ecuador, and no Paraguay, and no revival (however imperfect) of Sandinista Nicaragua” (Raby 11). Cuba serves as both an example and advocate for its fellow Latin American countries. The Cuban Revolution inspires other countries to take up arms against unjust and oppressive leadership. Additionally, Cuba is one of the only countries to persist and thrive regardless of a lack of support provided by the Western World’s most threatening power, the United States. This inspires other countries and also connects them to Cuba instead, seeking positive interventionism instead of paternalism (typical of United States intervention and control). Cuba’s global involvement is not solely passive. Instead, Cuba recognizes that it maintains the resources to spread the practice it seemingly perfected through *Yo Sí Puedo*. The global perspective assumed by Cuba can be further understood in the theoretical context of “critical global citizenship:

“As citizens of Cuba, the US, and all countries try to identify their orientations toward global citizenship, there is a need for what has been called critical global citizenship.
Viewing globalization through a critical lens, people can become critical global citizens with priorities for advancing empathy, solidarity, and social justice in the world. Critical global citizens study the history of power and domination while seeking a vision for a greater humanity” (Abendroth 1).

Cuba, diverting great resources to both literacy and medical mission outreach worldwide, represents a turning point for global citizenship. Cuba presents a unique case of outreach and invited interventionism (as opposed to imposed interventionism) that addresses social concerns globally. The Cuban practice does not interfere with existing leadership, infrastructure, or culture, but rather supports it. The Literacy Campaign established the groundwork, in the form of a unique and newly emerging critical pedagogy, which grew into the practice of critical global citizenship. These two concepts, therefore, have forever changed the revolutionary approach both inside and outside of Cuba. They have been further developed to provide theoretical frameworks for other practices and mindsets and serve as perhaps the most striking results of the campaign on a larger scale.

Despite this invaluable contribution to literacy campaigns, Latin America, and critical pedagogy and global citizenship in general, the Cuban Literacy Campaign has faced its share of opposition and maintains its own subset of faults. Among the most highlighted is the self-exile the campaign imposed upon some pre-revolutionary teachers (Kempf 5). Many teachers who refused to integrate the revolutionary discourse into their lessons felt censored by the government, no longer able to teach what they had for the past several years (Provenzo & Garcia 2). These teachers were primarily of Spanish or United States descent, remnants of the recent “keepers” of Cuban education (Epstein 15). Regardless, the educators were expected to mount the revolutionary agenda on a united front. Those who were suspected to oppose the new reforms were encouraged
to take an early retirement and this sense of marginalization would quickly force many to seek refuge in Miami (Provenzo & Garcia 4; Kempf 5). This group of disenfranchised Cubans criticized heavily the system that had forced them out because they refused to assume the required materials. While “censorship” certainly raises a red flag, many scholars point to an even more oppressive censorship under the U.S. system and the parochial Spanish system that preceded the revolutionary system (Peréz 3). Many educational texts from pre-revolutionary Cuba were analyzed retroactively and subsequently deemed inappropriate and ineffective for the primary level (Paulston 155). In fact, Kempf claims: “Education in the pre-revolutionary period supported the capitalist structure of Cuban society and relied, as many educational systems have and continue to do, on top down models of information delivery by expert teachers to unknowing students: what Freire (1997) terms the banking model” (6). As evidenced by this example, education tends to reproduce the politics and social arrangements of the state. Censorship and political will may be at fault for sending non-revolutionary Cuban teachers into exile, it also prevented some of the revolutionary Cuban teachers from realizing their opportunity and potential until after 1959. The consideration of this commentary is essential to understanding the Campaign, however, as it proves that the initiative was not without faults, nor opposition.

This opposition was voiced in several secondary demonstrations or complaints about the Campaign as well. Opposition was explicitly demonstrated by counterrevolutionaries who would protest the revolutionary government and its efforts. Many brigadistas faced threats, violence, and even death22. Additionally, some consider the Campaign to have been an imposition “on a population that does not necessarily want to be literate” (Serra 131). While the campaign

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22 Conrado Benitez, the namesake of one of the brigadista groups, was one of the many killed, or “martyred”, by counterrevolutionaries in the line of literacy work (Leiner 184).
theoretically called for the creation of a “liminal space” in which identities of the instructors and peasants blended to form a dyadic relationship, each assuming both roles, the brigadistas may have “othered” the learners more than anticipated (Serra 134). In doing so, the Cuban Literacy Campaign may have provided liberation for the oppressed as opposed to liberation with the oppressed (Serra 134; Freire 49). Images of the newly literate formed the backbone of literacy based propaganda on the island. By idealizing the brigadista and the peasant learner, Castro and the Literacy Commission may have attracted more support and proved their success, but they also strengthened the argument for this disputed “othering” and debated “for vs. with” as inherent components of the Campaign. The question arises, however, as to whether or not these were simply limitations of the time and of the resources available to Castro at the time. Despite these grievances with the Campaign, Serra (139) recognizes that ideological revisions have been made on the part of the Literacy Commission and Educational Centers of Cuba since 1962 and that these organizations have made the effort to right the wrongs of the Campaign in today’s educational system. Regardless, this opposition and particular faults of the program are vital for a holistic evaluation of the efforts mounted in 1961.

Conclusion

After centuries of Spanish colonial rule and decades of United States intervention, 1959 brought with it the first ever Cuban government led by Cubans for Cubans. Fidel Castro brought with him a modern and socially conscious form of socialism that later morphed into a more sophisticated iteration of communism. In addition to this drastic recreation of the Cuban political and economic system, Castro implemented a social and cultural overhaul in an attempt to reimagine the island’s identity and what it meant to be a “New Man” in Cuba. As a part of this
overhaul, Castro, inspired by the ideology and theoretical observations being developed by his partner Che Guevara while attempting to dismantle the Batista government from the Sierra Maestras, announced to the Cuban people that this Revolution would be impossible without education. Guevara, a well-known rebel but a lesser well known advocate for education, had dedicated his free time to understanding and developing the emerging idea of “critical pedagogy”, a theory he would crudely develop on his own before contemporaries such as Giroux Freire could formally establish it. This theory would contribute to the formation of one of the century’s most ambitious literacy movements ever undertaken, especially when Castro audaciously told his critics in the UN that it would be done in less than a year. The movement brought together all sectors of the Cuban population, and together they became a fully literate Cuban people. Despite limitations and critiques, the Campaign developed into an application of popular education, an implementation of political will for the betterment of the people, a reconcept of the Cuban culture, and an inception of critical global citizenship. Guevara, hopeful that he could bring this sort of success to other struggling Latin American countries, left for Bolivia in the mid-1960s. Before he could successfully roundup sufficient support, Guevara was gunned down by the Bolivian army - and in a school nonetheless. Che has become a symbol of communism and revolution, but perhaps it is time to recognize him as the advocate and martyr for education that he was less commonly known as. The Cuban Literacy Campaign, perhaps nonexistent without the ideals of Guevara, would continue this legacy of global revolution, justice, and liberation. Once the Cuban island established its own post-campaign educational system, one that would continue to grow and thrive under critical pedagogy, it shifted its gaze outwards. Cuban efforts on behalf of literacy outreach are unmatched. In fact, because of Cuba’s drive to create a more literate Latin
America, campaigns spring up across the globe. This form of literacy based outreach brings us to the next pivotal campaign: the Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade of 1980.

Chapter 3: NICARAGUA

Nicaragua: La Cruzada del Alfabetismo

(1980)

Do you know what, I am no longer ignorant anymore. I know how to read now. Not perfectly, you see, but I know how to. And do you know what, your son isn’t ignorant anymore either. Now he knows how we live, what we eat, how we work, and he knows the life of the mountains. Your son, ma’am, has learned to read from our book. - Campesino nicaraguense in a letter to a brigadista’s mother

Modern man is not loyal to a monarch or a land or a faith, whatever he may say, but to a culture - Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism (1983)

Introduction

Nicaragua faced anything but a smooth transition into nationhood after gaining its independence from Spain in 1821. In the two centuries after independence, the country experienced a slew of international military and economic interventions, a variety of governments and authoritative regimes, and a plethora of social programs that were intended to cure social problems. The 1980 National Literacy Crusade was one such social program and has become a defining moment in the history of the transition of power from the 40-year dictatorship of the Somoza dynasty to the revolutionary government of the Sandinistas in the decade of the 1980s. Despite being touted as one of the most impressive literacy campaigns ever mounted with respect to its brief timeline, national reach, and short term effectiveness, the long term outcomes of the Nicaraguan Literacy
Crusade were more limited than national expectations (Huebler 5). The campaign, instead, has come to represent Nicaragua’s constant struggle to create a post-Somoza national identity and legitimacy as a nation. Herein lies the campaign’s true success, according to most sources: In its moment, the Crusade combatted illiteracy and established a sense of national pride and national unity that were necessary for the legitimacy of Sandinista government. More far reaching, however, was the Crusade’s ability to develop a unified culture that the Nicaraguans could feel a sense of allegiance towards. Unlike its counterparts and predecessors in other countries, ultimately the Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade was more effective as an exercise in building a sense of a commonly-shared national culture than in permanently eradicating illiteracy (Baracco 5). A decades-long history of turnover of successive regimes both before and after 1990 and unrest points to the necessity of this nation building through culture (Walker 13). As Gellner points out in the epigraph above, people are truly loyal to the culture they share. Inspired by revolutions and pedagogical developments in Latin America at the time, the Literacy Crusade became the ideal vehicle to accomplish this goal. The following exploration of the Crusade reveals the transient nature of Nicaraguan identity and highlights the hidden intentions, both tacit and overt motives of the fight against illiteracy and, simultaneously, a fight to establish nationwide a sense of democratic citizenship.

**Independence through Somoza: Generating a Culture of Illiteracy**

The history of Nicaragua has most succinctly been characterized as “one of Latin America’s most violent political traditions”, with lengthy periods of dictatorial rule, and had never

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23 In 2011, Nicaragua’s literacy rate is 78% and expected to fall 5 percentage points by 2015, according to UNESCO. Men are increasingly less literate, in fact women are more likely to be literate in the younger generations.
experienced a peaceful interparty transfer of power following a free election prior to 1990 (Seligson & Booth 778). As a part of the Spanish Colonial Empire, Nicaragua, initially a faction of the Viceroy of New Granada, suffered the common fate of an exploited colonial landhold (Weber 98). Prized as a source of wood, dried meat, tallow, leather, cocoa, and indigenous slave labor, Nicaragua became a hierarchical, hacienda-based society that developed a “virtual autarky” due to such export driven success (Booth 97; Weber 98). This autarky would allow for an easy transition to independence, at least economically speaking. Socially, however, the hacienda culture had established a structure that would lead to “endemic warfare” between the so-called “liberals” of Léon and the “conservatives” of Granada: “the former being, in principle, modernist, masonic admirers of the American and French Revolutions, the latter traditionalist bigots attached to aristocratic values” (Weber 98). It is important to note that these “liberals” championed free trade more than civil rights and freedoms, and thus were no less prone to forcing peasants and subsistence farmers into civil servitude as soldiers than were the “conservatives”. Wealthy landowners sent these troops to civil war in a manner that has been likened to “wars between clans of rival nobles” in feudal times (Weber 98). This created a chronic state of instability that would lead to incessant war, continuous pleas for foreign aid, and never-ending ideological battles.

This internal unrest following independence in 1821 brought Nicaragua to the forefront of the global stage: Britain and the United States now saw an emerging opportunity to usurp political and economic control of the bountiful and ideally located Latin American jewel. For several decades, the British controlled the eastern coast of Nicaragua, forming a protectorate over the Miskito natives there; Nicaraguan independence only strengthened Britain’s desire to maintain and potentially expand this stronghold (Walker & Wade 12). At the same time, the United States quite literally struck gold in what would soon be California. Land travel to the west coast proved
t treacherous and so the United States sought an interoceanic transit route, with Nicaragua as the prime candidate for the site of a man-made canal (Weber 99). Conflict loomed on the horizon for the two international powers. In an attempt to mitigate any costly confrontation, the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty (1950) was quickly drafted. The document states that “the United States and Britain mutually renounced the right to any unilateral exploitation of the region [Nicaragua]” (Booth 98). This moment, however, did not signify an end to international interventionism.

The idea of an international waterway through the Latin American isthmus brought a great deal of attention to Nicaragua, as several transit companies were vying for the endeavor’s economic advantages. Competition on the part of transit companies quickly became intertwined with the clash between Nicaraguan Liberals and Conservatives (Weber 101). Hoping to seek advantage from the business dispute, the Liberals imported representatives from one of the companies and a small mercenary army of North Americans to help them defeat the Conservatives (Booth 98). However, the Liberals underestimated the ambition of the army’s commander, William Walker. In an attempt to colonize Nicaragua for the United States, Walker used his liberal support and force of arms to declare himself president in 1855 (Chasteen 162). During his “presidency”, Walker touted progress for the nation - declaring freedom of worship, adopting English as the national language, administering land grants to US citizens, and legalizing slavery, which had long been abolished in Nicaragua at that point (Weber 100). A joint Central American army took up arms against the US interloper and executed Walker in 1860 (Chasteen 162). Because of Walker’s association with the Liberals the party became nationally discredited and ensured uncontested Conservative rule for the interim, all of which prevented Nicaragua from joining Latin America’s Liberal trend until the 1890s (Booth 99; Chasteen 162). Walker’s legacy not only incited a dramatic
political response, but also provoked lasting social implications as a result of his policy regarding slavery.

Peonage and slavery had not existed in independent Nicaragua’s social structure prior to the 1870s. Unlike many of its Central American counterparts, Nicaragua boasted an egalitarian system that allowed any man, with the proper means, to set up a piece of land and cultivate it (Roman 29). Nicaragua also boasted a climate prime for the cultivation of coffee, with soils rich in volcanic sediment, cool highlands, and abundant rainfall. The global economy of the 1870s surged with the introduction of coffee as a commodity export and as demands grew Nicaragua had little choice but to increase its own production (Revels 17). An upper class assemblage of Nicaragua’s largest landholders, quickly deemed the cafeteleros, would seek any and all means to take advantage of the coffee boom, which required both extensive tracts of land and “free” labor. As a result, the conservative aristocracy began to dismantle the subsistence economy that had been loosely tied to a market system and implemented a legal means for the expropriation of lands and the enactment of forced labor (Weber 100). Displaced farmers were left with no other option but peonage; and so emerged a class divide never before seen in independent Nicaragua.

The agrarian bourgeoisie that developed as a result of these class divisions was fortified by the emergence of a nationalist, Liberal dictator, Jose Santos Zelaya, who would maintain power for nearly 16 years. Zelaya bolstered the educational and governmental infrastructure in such a way that the bourgeoisie became even stronger during his regime, creating censuses, archives, and a more modern army (Booth 99). This, in conglomeration with the newly established peonage structure, would create a culture of lower class submission and illiteracy that would plague Nicaragua for just under a century. Zelaya, hoping to strengthen Nicaragua’s international economic standing, began to seek non-US support for the construction of a trans-isthmian canal,
one that could rival the US’s in Panama (Booth 98). In order to protect its canal monopoly, the United States squelched the bidding war between British, Japanese, and German transit companies and ended Zelaya’s regime altogether, replacing him with Adolfo Diaz (Booth 99). The 1910 installation of Diaz, a US-backed, Conservative president, instigated Conservative-Liberal tumult that led to civil war (Paige 4). These violent outbreaks would temporarily weaken the social structure created during the coffee boom. US intervention, however, would prove to be the reinvigorating force necessary for corruption and bourgeoisie control as Nicaragua entered the 20th century.

In order to control the revolt instigated by the installment of Diaz as president, the United States marines were sent to occupy Nicaragua. Military occupation lasted from 1912 to 1933 (Paige 5). During this time, the US implemented a series of “puppet governments” that would prevent the construction of a Nicaraguan canal, accelerate US control of the growing coffee and banana industry, and advocate for the creation of a constabulary that combined the army and police - the Nicaraguan National Guard (Guardia Nacional) (Booth 99). Opposition to the US occupation grew as the US incursion became overbearing. By 1925 there was approximately one “Yankee soldier” to every one hundred Nicaraguans. Lower class Nicaraguans despised the “Yankee Soldiers” because of the torture, abuse, and brutality they inflicted, in addition to the Liberal expulsion they incited (O’Malley 116). At this time, Augusto Cesar Sandino emerges as the liberal, patriot guerrilla leader who most adamantly opposed the “imperialism” of the United States and believed that Nicaraguans should “run their own country” (Chasteen 208; O’Malley 113). The six-year guerrilla war that ensued catapulted Sandino to the forefront of Latin American nationalist lore, as his US defiance became synonymous with heroism (Chasteen 208). Sandino came to
represent a shift in the Liberal-Conservative tug-of-war, trading general patri-based allegiances for figure-based ideals.

Sandino became the first Nicaraguan nationalist. This meant that for the first time in the nation’s history, distinct elements of society and nationality were fused together to form a distinct identity. The ideology that promulgated through the Nicaraguan peasantry became known as the “Sandinista consciousness”, an identity that united Liberals, peasants, and other lower class citizens on social, economic, and political terms (Grossman 85). Out of this consciousness emerged the idea of a “Sandinista family”, which outlined the importance of familial ties and gender roles, and a value system focused on “honor”, which defined man as honorable if he protected and provided for his family (Grossman 84). These ideas became more broadly applied to the “Sandinista nation”, as ‘Nicaragua’ developed into a global proxy for ‘family’ (Grossman 86). Because of this Sandinista conscientization, Sandino’s guerrilla efforts gained enough support to eventually expel the US marines. In doing so, Sandino cemented his position as the symbol of liberalism, a free Nicaragua, and a united lower class (O’Malley 118). Now, the Liberal-Conservative standoff had transformed into the Sandinista-Anti-Sandino divide.

The counterpart to Sandinismo emerged quickly. With the end of US occupation, Sandino agreed to sign a preliminary peace agreement with the Conservative government in 1933, calling for cease fire among his guerrilla fighters (Walker & Wade 22). The National Guard took advantage of the cease fire to regain its bearings and eventually control of Nicaragua. During the war, in an attempt to “Nicaraguanize” the efforts against the Sandinista threat, the National Guard had been significantly enlarged (Booth 99). Now, stronger than ever, the National Guard took advantage of peace and the commander, Anastasio Somoza Garcia, ordered Sandino’s assassination in 1934 - eliminating the threat entirely (O’Malley 116). In 1936, Somoza Garcia
used the National Guard to seize political control. Somoza’s presidency was actually viewed positively in popular opinion. When the dust settled after the Sandino assassination, Somoza had ensured public favor while also ensuring the National Guard’s utmost loyalty. Scare tactics became common practice: Somoza created his own riots, unbeknownst to the public, only to have the National Guard “squelch” them (Crawley 90). Additionally, his self-serving support of “better candidates” created an image of humility and concern for Nicaragua, which only eased the transition when the elected official was finally weak enough to be overturned (Crawley 95).

Educated in the United States, fluent in English, able to ally himself with local elites, supportive of the National Guard, and supportive of US policy, Somoza Garcia faced little opposition from the United States upon his rise to presidency (Whisnant 110). The Somoza family, thus supported by the United States government and the National Guard, would maintain control of Nicaragua for the next forty years. Somocismo had developed into the Sandinista antithesis.

Under Somoza, Nicaragua experienced a complete social and political overhaul. The regime managed to consolidate the National Bank, eliminate local electorates, and promote upper class superiority through land holds (Walter 116). At the same time, the National Guard developed utter loyalty to Somoza, as many high ranking officials were eliminated and Somoza acquired ultimate command (Crawley 100). Anastasio Somoza Garcia, following his assassination (1957), was replaced by his son, Luis Somoza Debayle, who would later be succeeded by his younger brother, Anastasio Somoza Debayle (Whisnant 164; Crawley 134). Despite recurrent bouts of opposition and some dangerously close, detrimental elections, the Somoza family established a Nicaraguan dynasty (Crawley 160). The dynasty’s corruption maintained the agrarian bourgeoisie that had emerged during Nicaragua’s coffee era. This, in addition to policy beneficial only to the upper class, plunged Nicaragua into a “plantation-like society” that would persist until 1979.
(Walter 240). The growing need for cheap, exploitable labor within the economy was the cornerstone for the Somoza position on education.

Education and politics were closely intertwined during the Somoza regime. Just as the legislative branch, judicial branch, and National Guard had all transformed into mere extensions of Somoza’s executive authority, so had the education system. Under this “centralized education structure” all related decisions were made by the president or his appointed cabinet members that served in the Ministry of Education (Kraft 85). The Nicaraguan Ministry of Education outlined lofty and admirable goals, including the installment of national unity, development of spiritual values, creation of democratic consciousness, elimination of violence and aggression, guidance towards a scientific attitude, and provision of vocational guidance (Kraft 88). Somoza himself would become heavy-handed in enforcing these goals, at times himself taking a red-pen to proposed primers and curricula, but only when foreign aid or US support was on the line (Kraft 87). The Ministry took these opportunities to focus primarily on the cultivation of agrarian skills, the development of loyalty to Somoza, and the denigration of Sandinista heroism (Kraft 90). Sandino stood as an opposing force to Somoza, which threatened the regime’s authority. Therefore, the symbol had to be reimagined into something negative: Sandino was labeled a bandit (Whisnant 371). When foreign aid in support of education initiatives was not being offered, Somoza assumed the opinion that “deschooling” the general population was in the country’s general interest were it to maintain a docile and cheap labor force (Kraft 88). A literate population posed a threat to Somoza and his loosely abided constitution, he therefore provided limited resources to and mounted few initiatives in the field of education. This inaction on the part of the regime is best characterized by Anastasio Somoza’s statement: “I don’t want educated people; I
want oxen” (Whisnant 164). Only by centralizing education was the Somoza dynasty able to suppress education for the duration of the regime.

According to one educator, any effort mounted against the regime was nearly impossible. In fact, “teaching people to think is the worst crime you can commit under the Somoza government” (Lernoux 85). As a result, by the eve of the Nicaraguan Revolution in 1979, just over half of the population was illiterate. Those that were literate were members of the aristocracy, lived in cities, or only maintained minimal baseline reading levels. When the Earthquake of 1972 hit Nicaragua, the foundation of the Somoza dynasty began to crumble. With it crumbled the belief that poor, ignorant masses were needed to maintain the nation’s economy. In this moment, Sandino is revived as a national hero and the Sandinista party is formed. The return of the Sandinista mission represents the end of a Somocista one, the end of tolerating a plantation economy, and the end of repressing education for the masses - the only thing standing in the way of the full realization of all of this was a Revolution.

**Sandino Returns: The Nicaraguan Revolution**

Anastasio Somoza Debayle solidified the dynasty’s legitimacy throughout the 1960s - effectively eliminating any and all opposition. At the close of such a promising decade, the regime had not anticipated the swift and dramatic end that was looming on the horizon. In 1969, armed conflict in Honduras and El Salvador coincided with declines in international prices for primary agricultural products. As a result, the Nicaraguan economy became stagnant (Jarquin & Barreto 123). In an attempt to compensate for the economic crisis, Somoza increased public spending, only to increase unemployment and decrease public income which would plunge Nicaragua further into economic despair. Then, on December 23, 1972, a deadly earthquake ravaged Managua. Despite killing upwards of 20,000 people, the disaster actually marked the revival of the failing economy
Disaster response also revealed the full extent of the National Guard’s corruption, defiling the legitimacy so recently established.

An influx of international, public, private, and insurance reconstruction funds poured into the city. However, a large majority of this money enriched only the Somoza dynasty as he sidestepped a large majority of the bourgeoisie and personally organized his own bank, insurance company, finance, and construction firms (Jarquin & Barreto 123). These actions guaranteed an even greater accumulation of wealth for the regime by edging out all other capitalist competition. While Somoza was busy securing the contracting rights for the reconstruction of the city, the National Guard took advantage of the disheveled wreckage and looted the ruined capital (Black 147). Public safety could not be ensured and “any remaining public respect for the military evaporated” (Black 148). Somoza had once called the earthquake a “revolution of possibilities”, however his own revolution fell short in the face of opposition (Weber 151). The earthquake accelerated class struggle, revealed the corruption within the National Guard, turned the upper class bourgeoisie against the regime, and finally diminished the power vacuum that prevented the formation of Somoza’s rivals.

This diminishing power vacuum became the most valuable tool for the rise of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in the late 1970s. The earthquake’s aftermath had systematically turned each major Nicaraguan social class against the Somoza regime in some way and by the end, the regime “had become so isolated that eventually only brute military force held the government in power” (Booth 125). For almost two decades, the FSLN grew and developed slowly. As a political and cultural reclamation of the movement incited by Augusto Sandino in the late 1920s, the Sandinista party represented the totality of Somoza opposition. While at times a bit radical for smaller factions of its allied parties, the Front fully unified during the disintegration of
the regime’s authority and political legitimacy post-earthquake (Booth 148). 1978 represented, for the first time in years, the FSLN’s opportunity to step into the public sphere and denounce the regime. Finally the dreams of its founder, Carlos Fonseca Amador, had the potential to be fulfilled.

In order to understand the Nicaraguan Revolution, it is necessary to understand these dreams that Fonseca and his collaborators developed in the shadows of the Somoza regime; they, in turn, would spark the Literacy Crusade of 1980. Fonseca rose from the Nicaraguan working class. Winning “renown for his intelligence and leadership”, he left for Managua to study at the National Autonomous University (Booth 138). There he developed leftist associations and met his soon-to-be collaborator, Tomas Borge. Many have wondered why a young student with humble beginnings, such as Fonseca, became such an influential player in one of the biggest revolutions in history. One of the best explanations offered claims that he:

“was not an erudite or sophisticated Marxist theorist. He might best be described as a consummate “organic intellectual” in the Gramscian sense: a thinker and a militant of the subaltern class who grasped the crucial need for the revolutionary opposition to dominate the terrain of culture and ideology with a resonant “myth” - a symbol of the national popular “collective will” - if the vanguard group was to capture “the artistic imagination of those who have to be convinced, and [give] political passions a more concrete form” (Palmer 92).

Well aware of the myth surrounding Sandino both during his lifetime and after his death, Fonseca drew upon Sandino’s writings, teachings, and guerrilla practices to incite the revolution he so desired. Fonseca believed that an emergent FSLN had to stress two main themes: recognition of the importance of the common Nicaraguan, i.e. the peasantry, and the threat posed by US Imperialism (Zimmerman 8). These themes had permeated Sandino’s mission to reclaim
Nicaragua for the people in 1927, thus making Sandino the perfect martyr and myth for the developing cause. Fonseca’s adoption of Sandino as the emblem of his movement - in conjunction with the ideology he was developing - gave him the necessary credibility for the Front to take root during the mid-1960s.

The predominant ideology of the newly formed FSLN was an organic conception of old ideals. After gaining some more experience and insight, Fonseca rejected the conservatism and bureaucratic methods of the established Nicaraguan Communist party in favor of the revolutionary Marxism of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro in Cuba (Zimmerman 9). In search of more pragmatic nationalism, Fonseca begins to develop a unique fusion of scientific socialism and revolutionary Nicaraguan nationalism in his writings (Booth 140). Many have described the resulting ideology thus promoted by Fonseca and the FSLN as an intertwining of Marxism and nationalism, blending the revolutionary spirit of Che Guevara and Augusto Sandino (Palmer 96; Booth 141; Zimmerman 8). Small groups of like-minded individuals banded with Fonseca during the 1960s and early 1970s; these groups, however, never rose above a couple hundred in numbers (Booth 139). Taking cues from the Cuban Revolution, Fonseca and his collaborators believed that the best way to promote this new ideology and make use of the small support structure they had amassed was to create a fledgling guerrilla vanguard (FSLN 139). Systematic and small scale victories on the part of the FSLN in the face of National Guard opposition during the early 1970s accrued valuable traction for the Sandinista guerrillas. As Somoza’s forces weakened and proved unable to squelch the FSLN growth, the time had finally arrived for Fonseca and his forces to step into the public spotlight.
As an effort to ignite popular support in the public eye, Fonseca penned the pamphlet *Nicaragua: Hora Cero (Nicaragua: Hour Zero)* (1969). In it, the FSLN makes the following oath to the people of Nicaragua:

> Before the image of Augusto Cesar Sandino and Ernesto Che Guevara; before the memory of the heroes and martyrs of Nicaragua, Latin America, and humanity as a whole; before history: I place my hand on the black and red flag that signifies ‘Free Homeland or Death,’ and I swear to defend the national honor with arms in hand and to fight for the redemption of the oppressed and exploited in Nicaragua and the world. If I fulfill this oath the freedom of Nicaragua and all the peoples will be the reward; if I betray this oath, death in disgrace and dishonor will be my punishment* (Fonseca 41).

This oath, powerful as it may be on its own, was supported by an extensive commentary on how the Nicaraguan people had been wronged by Somocismo and US imperialism. Fonseca focuses on three primary wrongdoings: economic disadvantage, healthcare disparity, and educational shortcomings among those in the lower and working classes. The latter, of primary importance to this study, was never before given much concern. Fonseca outlines the issue and makes evident that, “only 1.1 percent of the Nicaraguan population has completed primary school. Fifty percent of the population has had no schooling whatsoever...And only 21 percent of the student population comes from the sector of society with income levels at or below the country’s average” (Fonseca 26). *Zero Hour* dramatically changed the landscape of Nicaraguan politics and the revolutionary spark was finally ignited. The support necessary for an FSLN revolution had been recruited just in time for the 1972 earthquake.

Small military operations that coincided with the demise of the Somoza dynasty around the time of the earthquake freed political prisoners, gained ransoms, and increased political
visibility of the FSLN (Gorman 135). Continued guerrilla missions across the country helped unite the various factions of the Sandinista party under nine general leaders, this is said to be the ultimate insurance of the FSLN’s revolutionary success. Soon, political and labor organizations threw their support behind the newly united FSLN and the agrarian bourgeoisie had to comply, despite wanting a US mediated reconstruction, i.e. *Somocismo sin Somoza* (*Somozaism without Somoza*) (Gorman 136). On June 8, 1979, the final military insurrection took place across 15 cities, between 2000 Sandinista guerillas and 15,000 National Guardsmen. All cities had fallen by July 5 and on July 17, unable to secure foreign military aid, Somoza fled the country. The FSLN assumed power on July 19, and so began the official return to Sandinismo in Nicaragua (Gorman 137).

In accordance with the 25 point “umbrella plan” that the FSLN had distributed to the Nicaraguan people a year before the victory, the newly instated junta based government announced a series of sweeping social reforms. These reforms included the confiscation of all Somoza family property, nationalization of the banks and mining/lumber industries, land reform, the unionization of workers, and the devolution of decision-making power to mass organizations. Of particular interest, however, is “Point 14” of this plan: “The Frente Sandinista will dedicate itself from the very start to fight against illiteracy so that all Nicaraguans may learn how to read and write; and everyone, including adults, will be able to attend school to prepare for a career and to excel” (Saavedra 108). The desire to educate the people and eradicate illiteracy rose to the top of the FSLN agenda. Within months, the junta announced that 1980, the inaugural year of revolutionary control, would be the “Year of Literacy”; and so began the Cruzada Nacional de Alfabetización (CNA) (*National Literacy Crusade*) on March 23, 1980 (Arnove 270).

24 Carlos Fonseca Amador would die in battle before the 1979 victory. While he never got to witness the realization of the Revolutionary, anti-Somoza government, he became a martyr in the name of the FSLN. His is idealized by the party in a similar fashion to Sandino.
The Crusade

The 1979 Nicaraguan Revolution was, at its core, a liberation movement. The masses of people that rose up against Somoza and the National Guard were of various political persuasions, uniting under the FSLN battlecry for reasons that were ideological more than political. They were fighting against a “corrupt and brutally repressive regime” in the name of heroes and martyrs such as Augusto Cesar Sandino and Carlos Fonseca Amador (Arnove 271). In search of this liberation, the FSLN maintained two fundamental ideas that led them to believe literacy was of the utmost importance in their reform system: first, the Revolution possessed a moral obligation to provide justice to the population, and second, literacy was the primary form of justice necessary to prepare the entire population for the task of national reconstruction (Arrien 94). The FSLN Ministry of Education notes that, “to carry out a literacy project and consolidate it with a level of education equivalent to the first grades of primary school, is to democratize a society. It gives the popular masses the first instruments needed to develop awareness of their exploitation and to fight for liberation. Therefore, literacy training was something that the dictatorship could not accept without contradicting itself” (Nicaraguan Ministry of Education 1). And despite 50.3% of the population being “unprepared”, so to speak, or illiterate, the FSLN was firm in its goals: the country would be literate, the country would be liberated (Hanemann 2).

During the 1979 preparations for the great literacy undertaking, the FSLN junta appointed Fernando Cardenal as the coordinator of the Crusade. Cardenal became part of a national organization that was governed by the new Ministry of Education, and it would be his role to define

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25 Cardenal, a Jesuit priest and liberation theologian, was “committed to a Marxist agenda of promoting social justice and alleviating poverty, who joined the revolutionary Sandinista cabinet”. His, and his brother’s, impact on the Revolution and the overthrow of Somoza placed him among some of the most highly regarded intellectuals of the revolutionary movement. This placed him at the forefront of public attention and is the perhaps the most prominent reason why he was called on to lead the mission. (Roberts, 2016, New York Times).
the campaign, elicit support for the campaign, and manage all campaign related political directives (Fernández 134). This preparation period granted Cardenal the opportunity to accomplish four primary tasks before the commencement of the Crusade early the following year: 1. A census that would detail who was illiterate, who was literate, and who wanted to teach; 2. An advertisement campaign that would elicit teacher support and inform the country of the Crusade to come; 3. The development of the Crusade’s primary pedagogy and teaching materials; 4. The recruitment of foreign support that could hopefully lead to financial assistance (Fernández 135). In turn, these tasks allowed for one of the most incredible literacy movements ever -- given the five month timespan, the amount of illiterates, and the country’s postwar socioeconomic situation (Arnove 272).

Cardenal and his fellow Ministry coordinators realized that during Somoza’s regime very little work had been done to catalogue the country’s demographic information. Because of this, the first task completed in early October of 1979 was an extensive, inexpensive census. Of primary concern in the questionnaire was the name, location, occupation, and level of literacy of all Nicaraguans over 10 years old (Deiner 119). In addition to this information, census collectors gauged the availability of teaching volunteers and the accessibility of potential teaching locations (Hanemann 3). In the course of two weeks, the census had been completed; in the course of another 10 days, 2500 volunteer “census tabulators” compiled, by hand, a map and data spreadsheet displaying the results (Deiner 119). At its core, the census is considered a “miniature campaign in itself”, because it managed to “inform people about the upcoming literacy campaign, overcome cultural barriers between urban and rural areas, and develop first relationships of mutual

26 Computer time was much too expensive for the amount of data collected during the census, therefore the data was analyzed and tabulated by hand. Volunteers were given an intensive training to insure accuracy.
commitment”, all of which are considered to be the underpinnings of the Crusade (Hanemann 3; Black 50). The census revealed that there was a great divide between the urban and rural populations, with a total illiteracy rate of 50.3% nationwide but an illiteracy rate as high as 76% in rural towns. The census also uncovered that in an ideal world there would be one teacher for every one illiterate (Torres 117). This urban-rural division played a key role in the later outcomes of the campaign. Due to varying population needs, many different organizations were recruited in order to compensate for the degree of variability revealed by the census. Cardenal thus encouraged widespread participation that eventually included 25 separate civil organizations that would later “decentralize” the campaign in such a way that it was conducted primarily through robust population participation instead of the government itself (Hanemann 4). Now, with a better sense of who would be targeted, who would be involved, and who would be recruited, the Crusade could develop further.

Immediately after the completion of the census, Cardenal and his team began to develop the pedagogy that would drive the campaign, ultimately creating a guiding text/primer. In late October, Paulo Freire was invited to Managua to speak with Cardenal and the Crusade’s education team. As a result of this visit, experiential learning and participant creativity were stressed in the developing pedagogy. Freire stressed the importance of the “liberating revolutionary process”, which would be more valuable than the most experienced of teachers and the most polished of primers (Cardenal & Miller 17). However, the pedagogical theorist left the country for Brazil and Nicaragua still had two technical questions that had to be addressed: “how to design literacy materials for use by volunteer teachers and how to translate young people’s enthusiasm and

27 This value decreased to one teacher for every three illiterates, however, based on census “willingness to teach” responses and the final turnout at training sessions.
commitment into a minimum set of pedagogical skills” (Cardenal & Miller 17). In hope of answering these questions, the Literacy Commission that Cardenal assembled looked both inwards and outwards. First, the group interrogated common practices among Nicaraguan clandestine literacy efforts. Despite Somoza’s repressive nature, hidden efforts had been mounted with small groups of students in order to promote literacy, yielding noticeable success (Cardenal 69). Then, the group analyzed other countries’ programs in the light of local Nicaraguan needs. A cohort visited Cuba for over a week, interacting with brigadistas, visiting the Literacy Museum, and speaking with Castro himself (Cardenal & Miller 18). With all of this inspiration in tow, the Crusade is considered a truly Nicaraguan effort that was created semi-organically. Considerations were given to the advice from Freire and Cuban sources, but the Crusade’s educational team spent months developing and piloting programs through collective effort, founded on dialogue. It is therefore said that the Crusade emerged from the reality and needs of Nicaragua at the time (Cardenal & Miller 18). The basic primer was *El Amanecer del Pueblo* (*The Dawn of the People*) with a secondary primer being *Cálculo y Reactivación: Una Sola Operación* (*Math and Economic Reconstruction: One Single Operation*)28.

*El Amanecer del Pueblo* became the backbone of the Crusade. The primer was divided into twenty-three lessons, each containing a generative theme divided into three sections: the history and development of the Revolution, the socioeconomic programs of the Government of National Reconstruction; and civil defense and community participation (Arnove 275). Each theme was accompanied by a photograph, a phrase with polysyllabic words that could be broken down into basic sound and meaning units (phonemes and morphemes), in addition to small readings and

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28 The mathematical concepts put forth in this primer were of secondary importance, and were typically not introduced until the student was comfortable with basic literacy techniques. The math, however, became a strong motivating point for younger students and sparked more creativity than had been anticipated (Arnove 275).
writing prompts (Arnove 252). Early themes pertain to revolutionary heroes such as Augusto César Sandino and Carlos Fonseca Amador. For so long these two had been characterized as criminals in opposition to the Somoza regime; now, they were reimagined as heroes (Barraco 345). Other themes included health care, education, rights and responsibilities of the citizens under the FSLN, land reform, the Sandinista Army, and the commitment of the new revolutionary regime to solidarity with other progressive governments. The associated words were key in developing these generative themes further. For instance, the first word introduced to learners would be “revolución”. The word contains all of the vowels in the alphabet and some of the most common phonemes (Arnove 253). Following the introduction of this word, a short reading, and an image, teachers were encouraged to lead a one-hour experience-based discussion relating to the material and then a 1 hour practice session, in which the participants continued to read and began writing (see Figure 1. For example from the primer provided by Cardenal 1981).

In addition to these lesson plans, the teachers were encouraged to incorporate a “ten-step” dialogue method that would help the teachers guide students through the two-hour session. This dialogue process, however, is considered “one of the weakest areas of the method” (Miller 220). It is believed that the general flexibility of this process created a degree of unfamiliarity and uncomfortableness on the part of the literacy teachers. Therefore, the dialogue did not yield the results that so many members on the educational team had hoped for (Miller 221). The accompanying methodology that did rise to the top was community-based action research. Teachers were equipped with journals and the general freedom to explore the region that they were assigned. As a result, some of the most moving revolutionary sentiments were stirred up in both the teachers and learners (as many joined in the record keeping and exploration process). Detailed records were finally obtained and could be disseminated country-wide, and several communities
were finally given recognition that they once lacked (Hanemann 6). Through this community engagement stronger ties between the teachers and learners were established. These ties were maintained throughout the junta’s regime and helped strengthen the Sandinista movement. While some techniques clearly fell short of expectations, others succeeded. In turn, the implementation of the pedagogically renowned primer quickly earned success in the countryside. Systematic learning activities promoted experience-based popular education of the people, as teachers incorporated their own teaching, living, and learning experiences.

With an established primer, the Crusade now needed staffing. If the census revealed that in an ideal world there could be one literate teaching every illiterate Nicaraguan, where would teachers come from? In March 1980, the primary volunteers in the city of Managua were called up - they had previous ties to Cardenal, the new Education Commission, or the Sandinista effort. These 80 volunteers were given a two week intensive training course that inculcated them in the pedagogical, technical, and political agenda of the Crusade (Deiner 121). Then, through a “multiplier model”, each of these volunteers trained an additional cohort, who would go on to train another cohort, and another. In this way, the original 80 became 180,000 trained literacy brigadistas, a far cry from the 800,000 able literates, but Nicaragua wanted the support of the most willing (Cardenal & Miller 70). This selection of brigadistas became known as the Ejército Popular de Alfabetización (Popular/Citizen’s Literacy Army), the group that could work full time in the countryside for the duration of the five month campaign. Many of them were secondary or university students that had been pardoned from classes in order to fulfill the goals of the Crusade (Flora 54). An additional cohort was trained later in April. These teachers became the Alfabetizadores Populares (Citizen’s Literacy Promoters), who worked primarily in the cities, part time. These brigadistas were mostly professionals with full time careers, local housewives, or
government officials, who were unable to relocate for the duration of the Crusade (Hanemann 5; Deiner 122). Both sets of brigadistas not only served as literacy teachers, but actually resided in the homes of the illiterates whom they would teach. They were all integrated into homes, local cultures, and families that were completely unfamiliar to them. As a result, various forms of folktales, music, histories, and customs were shared, altered, and dispersed across Nicaragua (Hanemann 5). It can be said that this recruitment process unintentionally facilitated that unification of Nicaraguan culture that had been the goal in the primer. In the end 717,000 illiterates engaged with over 266,000 brigadista volunteers, accounting for more than half of the total Nicaraguan population (Flora 56). The expedited training process allowed for a swift yet inclusive start to the campaign in late March of 1980.

The totality of this work needed to be funded, the final hurdle for Cardenal and his team. Implementation rose to an estimated cost of $21 million US dollars. Given the economic crisis Nicaragua faced at the end of the Somoza regime, this pricetag left many arguing that the Crusade should be postponed. Many thought, however, that postponing the campaign would diminish the revolutionary momentum surging among potential volunteers immediately following the 1979 Revolution. Therefore, the education team solicited funds from international sources, with UNESCO being the most prominent supporter (Deiner 121). Many donors felt that through contributing to the campaign, they could provide some control and prevent “another Cuba” in Nicaragua (Deiner 122). Solicitations were in full force across the globe and across the country, and promotional materials relating to the Crusade became commonplace (Arnove 272). After several months of fundraising, Cardenal and Crusade leaders had secured enough money for the duration of the Crusade, although many debts remained between Nicaragua and international investors.
After thousands of discussions, thousands more recitations, and even thousands more practice writings, the Crusade came to a close in late August of 1980. Final examinations were given to participants in which they had to write their name, read a paragraph containing some of the more advanced vocabulary from later lessons in the primer, answer questions about the reading, take a dictation, and write an essay on one of three given themes; one final census was taken using the results of these examinations (Arnove 255). Considered to be understated and simple, the Crusade successfully disseminated the revolutionary and liberating pedagogy/ideology that the Sandinistas had hoped for. The rural and urban populations had been integrated and education was at the forefront of everyone’s minds. Follow-up work continued in Nicaragua after the official close of the Crusade, including efforts to promote indigenous literacy (Arnove 279). While a significant amount of work has been done to outline and understand the five months of the campaign, it is the “outcome” of the campaign that has left its mark on history. So, with understated celebration and quiet success, the FSLN pushed forward into the 1980s. The outcomes of the Crusade facilitated this forward momentum, but those on the educational team were faced with the toughest question of all: is it truly of great concern if the newly literates regress back to illiteracy?

**Outcomes, Lessons, and Critiques**

After five months, countless hours, and an overwhelming amount of citizen participation, the Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade was deemed a success. The illiteracy rate had decreased by 37.4% and the revolutionary political consciousness had united the rural and urban Nicaraguan populations. During reflection, however, only one of the four former ministers of education cited the reduction of illiteracy as the most important outcome of the campaign. In fact, all four readily recognized that due to the breakdown of post-Crusade adult education, something the country had
neither the money nor the time to support after the Crusade, rates of illiteracy began to rise by the mid-1980s (Baracco 346). Robert Arnove astutely characterizes the educational scene in Nicaragua post-Crusade as “contested terrain”. By 1983, Nicaragua’s educational system had been so decentralized that autonomous communities began implementing unsound and at times corrupt pedagogy and practice. With insufficient national funds to finance any school improvements or facilitate the inclusive pedagogy once valued during the Crusade, strict regulations created a regression back to “rote memorization” and traditional teaching styles, while schools also began administering fees around every corner. Matriculation fees, uniform fees, and supply fees became too much for many families to handle (Arnove 43). Longitudinally, the Nicaraguan government lacked the governance and financing abilities to further promote the ideals set forth during the Literacy Crusade of 1980. In turn, poverty forced many parents to pull their children from the system. By the mid-1980s a sharp decline in enrollment rates correlated with a decreasing emphasis on providing continuing education for those once targeted by Sandinista efforts (Arnove 44). Thus, illiteracy rates had nowhere to go but up. The short-lived success, then, of reduced illiteracy rates was only a minor outcome of the Crusade. In fact, many point to other outcomes as the most valuable national changes or lessons put into effect by the FSLN’s campaign.

The first of these outcomes is the reduction of national marginalization among various groups. Marginalization as a whole is perceived as the act of forcing people to the boundary zones, the periphery, away from the “center”. At this “center” more societal privileges are granted to its members (Hall 25). Throughout the Somoza regime, women, working class and lower class citizens, and children had been pushed out of the centers, literally and figuratively. The bourgeoisie

29 Some cities and towns maintained sound, popular education based adult programs through the 1980s. In these areas, illiteracy continued to decrease. This, however, was not the norm by the end of the decade. Small “pop-up” or organic programs continued to exist through the efforts of smaller organizations, but again with a limited scope (Sandiford 35).
held much of the nation’s wealth, power, and influence. “Deculturation” is viewed as a result of “marginality” due to marginalization (Rudmin 15). One could argue, then, that throughout the course of the Somoza dynasty, those pushed to the margins not only lost many rights and privileges but many lost their ability to access or interact with Nicaraguan culture. During the Crusade, the cultural exchange that resulted from the interaction between various classes, age groups, and genders from the urban and rural populations created a deep impact on the Nicaraguan people as a whole, as they gained “new insights into the socioeconomic and cultural realities of their country” (Hanemann 8). Through this shared understanding, the marginalized found the liberation that Cardenal had emphasized at the start of the Crusade.

For instance, 60% of the brigadistas were women. This created a significant shift in considerations made towards women in Nicaraguan society (Arnone 257). Now removed from subordinate positions, many women found emancipation in the leadership roles they assumed during the campaign (Miller 200). Additionally, many felt empowered to take control of their own lives and those of their children in the process. Women who became literate in 1980 as a result of the Crusade were found to have healthier practices in the home that led to better health outcomes for their children (Daniel 3). These women enjoyed increased respect among all levels of society.

The younger generation also found themselves removed from the margins. A unified identity under the revolutionary ideals made it possible to eliminate ideological and class barriers that prevented cooperation between the Nicaraguan youth. Now inspired by the fact that the new government would include everyone, social transformations occurred and yielded a more productive younger generation (Carnoy 337). Those in the lower class began to gain valuable skills that promoted the new revolutionary knowledge and attitudes while those in the upper class began engaging more with the population as a whole (Hanemann 8). Values imbued by the primers
created a cultural reform that many of the participants attempted to carry on through the 1980s, introducing and fighting for reform in all facets of society. Many participants involved themselves with education beyond the Crusade, within the scope of their capabilities (Hanemann 8). On the whole, this created a general respect for Nicaraguan youth regardless of their socioeconomic status as they became more inclusive and productive, working towards a shared revolutionary goal in which they were now invited to partake.

Finally, those of indigenous heritage finally received consideration. At the close of the primary Crusade in August, a second campaign was mounted on the coast. From October 1980 to March 1981, the educational commission developed and implemented a literacy effort among the Miskito, Sumo, and Creole English-speaking populations. As a result more than 13,000 indigenous peoples became literate in the local languages (Hanemann 8). Highly disregarded since the Spanish conquistadors had landed in Nicaragua, these populations were finally given the attention and regard from the government that they deserved. They were included in the revolutionary goals and considered to be a part of the unified Nicaragua (Arnow 259).

A second outcome is the example Nicaragua set on a global scale. Because the Sandinista movement was more socially than politically defined, especially with regard to the literacy movement, more international interest and support was attracted to it. Afraid to involve themselves with the increasingly socialist and communist Cuban efforts, many organizations such as UNESCO placed more weight and value in the Nicaraguan Crusade. Therefore, the advancements and achievements of the Crusade made “a substantial contribution to the world’s experience in finding solutions to eradicate illiteracy” (Arrien 3). Nicaragua’s fight against ignorance stepped to

the forefront of the global stage and set an example. Today, we are remiss not to see it in comparison with other literacy efforts (Torres 118). This global focus is perhaps most attributable to Paulo Freire’s close ties to the campaign. Having fully developed his theories regarding popular education by 1979, the Nicaraguan Crusade became one of the first demonstrable instances of popular education in practice, with the informed knowledge that it was in fact “popular education” (Arnove 259). As a practice in popular education, it demonstrates the importance of including student/learner experience in teaching methods. This approach becomes extremely valuable when teaching removed or isolated populations that may not feel welcome when it comes to formal education: for instance, the rural Nicaraguans who may never have stepped foot in school most certainly felt uneasy when it came to a primer based, teacher led learning style. While popular education rises to the top as the most influential example set within this second outcome, the Nicaraguan Crusade also demonstrated a need for other subsequent steps and processes in order to implement a successful campaign.

Unlike its various counterparts, the Nicaraguan effort championed “decentralization.” Which meant that Cardenal’s decision to include social organizations in the implementation and governance of the campaign limited hierarchical control on the part of the Sandinista government and the educational team. Institutional mechanisms and accountability factors were dispersed across several different groups, diminishing any one group’s ultimate control; this decentralized, diluted model has become common practice among 20th century Latin American governments with respect to education reform (Gershberg 1024). This model is best described as the “transfer of fiscal and/or administrative control from central governments to sub-national jurisdictions -

31 As opposed to the Cuban Campaign, which took place just before and at the time that Freire was developing his ideas in Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Retroactively the Cuban initiative has been labeled as “popular education”. Nicaragua emerged out of the theory deductively, unlike Cuba’s inductive development.
regional governments, municipalities, or the schools themselves” (Gershberg 63). In the case of Nicaragua, the Crusade and subsequent educational reform happened under “low legislative involvement”, and so the Ministry of Education in conjunction with other affiliated organizations developed policy and implemented it without the approval of the national legislature (Gershberg 64). In the case of Nicaragua, this holistic decentralization promotes local responsiveness, learning by doing, and less costly reforms while putting control in the hands of local/regional education officials. Its success is dependent, however, on the incentive, capacity, and long term commitment of the local officials (Larson 17; Gershberg 64). This local discrepancy, at times, promotes variable degrees of success between localities. For instance, organization-based success was not evenly distributed among the 25 different social groups that Cardenal invited to join the Crusade effort. This inequality among organizations - and later among localities - is an inherent flaw in decentralization, as it is difficult for the government to monitor and prevent irregularities in practice (Gershberg 1035). Parent involvement (or participant involvement) is an essential life blood for the decentralized model, as it supports the local officials and regional organizations. In this model, pedagogies can only be suggested by the government leadership, therefore sustaining popular education throughout the duration of and beyond the Crusade was at the jurisdiction of the locality. Despite these potential flaws, Nicaragua proved that decentralizing a national campaign such as the Literacy Crusade of 1980 was within the realm of possibility and did not require full political will and attention for campaign success.

The Literacy Crusade also revealed that collaboration, internal dialogue, and ample preparation are necessary steps in the process. Collaboration was essential for the successful development of the Crusade’s pedagogy and materials. In addition to speaking with Paulo Freire, the Nicaraguans reached out to countries such as Holland, Austria, Germany, Costa Rica, and Cuba
for materials, inspiration, and support (Fernández 135). Learning about the education systems and literacy campaigns in these countries helped prevent the need for a “from scratch” Crusade. While the Crusade did not, therefore, develop in a fully organic manner, internal dialogue within the Ministry for Education allowed those involved to take the information given to Nicaragua by other countries and adapt it to the Nicaraguan culture, realities, and needs (Cardenal & Miller, 6). For instance, the Nicaraguan educational team accepted the Cuban Yo Si Puedo campaign materials, but was hesitant to fully enact the program to Cuba’s specifications. Instead, the team took concepts, frameworks, and exercises that they deemed useful and adapted primer materials to the cultural messages and lessons necessary for a Nicaraguan in the new revolutionary state (Hanemann 3). This thoughtfulness was only made possible through the ample time granted to Cardenal and his collaborators in between the drafting of the campaign and the initial implementation. Therefore, the Crusade became a benchmark for highly successful integration of tested methods with local needs, exemplifying yet another necessary process for the global audience.

Finally, the Crusade demonstrated the ability to include a broad definition of literacy within one successful campaign. Unlike other campaigns at the time, the Literacy Crusade hoped to model for the Nicaraguan public that multiple literacies could be acquired. This model presented itself in the form of El Amanecer del Pueblo (The Dawn of the People) and Cálculo y Reactivación: Una Sola Operación (Math and Economic Reconstruction: One Single Operation), thus promoting other functional and vocational skills among illiterate participants (Arnove 257). Basic education was stretched beyond “learning to read and write” and transformed into the acquisition of multiple skill sets. In doing so, the Crusade enjoyed unforeseen success in that some participants were more inspired by the math skills than the reading skills they acquired during their lessons with
brigadistas (Lankshear 35). These skills were more readily transferable to new occupations or improved farming techniques after the end of the Crusade, especially if learning had been even more skill-based\textsuperscript{32} than the math lessons. While slightly more ambitious to include various “types” of literacies\textsuperscript{33}, the Nicaraguan Crusade revealed that in doing so it is possible to support a wider range of participants with various intrinsic interests. This results in a diversified set of literacy skills within the population. It also introduces a variety of motivating forces that can maintain post-campaign education in a way that narrowly focused campaigns do not.

The third, most salient and yet overlooked, outcome is the implications for revolutionary nation building. Using the Durkheimian functionalist approach, Ernest Gellner would argue that the National Literacy Crusade provided Nicaragua with the first real opportunity at nation building. Preliterate, agrarian societies are unable to support the idea of nation and nationalism, as many are riddled with social immobility and an inward-looking gaze (Gellner 13). As Nicaragua transitioned into a new form of industrialization, integrating the illiterate rural society, it transitioned into a state capable of constructing nationalism. Industrialization also promotes mass education systems, a sense of community, and divisions within agrarian society, in essence developing a new unique culture (Gellner 51). As Nicaragua used \textit{El amanecer del pueblo} as the grounds for establishing a unique and unified culture, it established a foundation on which to develop the nation as a whole. Additionally, through the promotion of a unified form of institutional governance through the Sandinista party, Nicaragua became a nation-state, which Anthony Giddens would argue is essential for the emergence of any form of nationalism (Giddens 213). From a third theoretical viewpoint, the implementation of the 23 lessons in the primer, all filled with Sandinista messages,

\textsuperscript{32} Some brigadistas modified lessons to include farming skills or other agrarian knowledge when they identified a need in their placement community (Arnove 260).
\textsuperscript{33} See next chapter for a definition of “types of literacies”
created a unified sense of community, “a deep horizontal comradeship”, which unified the Nicaraguan people despite their inability to know every citizen personally (Anderson 7). Therefore, in the sense of “imagined political communities”, the Crusade surely fortified a sense of belonging to an imagined entity equally under Sandino, not Somoza, as all Nicaraguans were encouraged to become literate and engage with Sandinista ideals (Anderson 6). Under several theoretical definitions, therefore, the Crusade marked the first opportunity to fight for a nationalist identity in Nicaragua.

While Benedict Anderson proposes print capitalism as the primary vehicle through which information promoting the shared idea of an imagined community is necessary, Luciano Baracco argues that the primer, in addition to regular print and radio updates34, is a mechanism that the Sandinista party used to operationalize their ideas (Anderson 25; Baracco 105). Through literacy, the Sandinistas could ensure the creation of a collective consciousness, culture, and identity while “re-presenting” what it meant to be “Nicaraguan” (Baracco 108). The fight against illiteracy had become synonymous with the fight fought by characters represented in the primer’s stories - Fonseca and Sandino in particular. Therefore, the “same heroic attitude emerged in fighting illiteracy” (Tünnerman 2). Each Nicaraguan that then took part in the Crusade became an equal to newly redefined heroes and martyrs because the primer had presented their contribution as significant in the battle against illiteracy. With a personal sense of unity to some of Nicaragua’s prominent historical figures, a sense of unified connection to the newly established Sandinista nation-state was nearly inevitable. For the first time in its history, Nicaragua was not defined by an imperial power, a puppet dictator, or stand-in military presence. Instead, it was self-defined.

34 A regular newsletter and radio broadcast occurred throughout the Crusade, sent out by Cardenal (or the current minister) and his team
The Crusade helped achieve this definition in a concerted effort that promoted uniform ideals and in such developed the new, emergent revolutionary nation of Nicaragua in 1980.

Despite significant outcomes such as these, the Crusade was not void of faults. Thus, various critiques exist. First and foremost, universal functional literacy had not been the final goal of the Crusade. In fact, many view the Crusade as a mission primarily concerned with conscientization, using literacy as a means to get there (Baracco 340). This criticism, however, reveals the inherent need to define, understand, and reimagine “literacy”. As will be discussed in the coming chapter, conscientization is the most predominant outcome (not criticism) in achieving literacy, and should be the overarching goal. Those who support this criticism of the campaign therefore possess a narrowly-defined sense of literacy, but also view functional literacy as the end goal. The concern about this aspect of the campaign is assumed to be derived from Nicaragua’s lack of concern for the rebounding illiteracy rates post-campaign, which indicates a prioritization of nation-building through conscientization by way of literacy. This final goal, prioritized above maintaining literacy and a sense of conscientization is where the issues arise for critics.

Another critique of the campaign involves the reported rate of illiteracy. Many report that the final rate of illiteracy after the end of the Crusade hovered around 22%, not the reported 12% (Arnove 255). This discrepancy is reported to occur because of a variable system of metrics. Due to age or debilitating illnesses, some Nicaraguans were identified as incapable of learning to read (Miller 59). Depending on which population would be considered, then, the rate of illiteracy differed. Without prior knowledge about the inclusion or exclusion of this subset of people in the

35 Conscientization defined as the acquisition of critical consciousness of social and economic conditions as a first step towards transforming them (Freire 41).
calculations, many were left feeling a sense of dissatisfaction with the campaign due to the reported discrepancies.

Finally, while a large proportion of the population took part in the Crusade, opposition remained. Members of the bourgeoisie who had been protected under Somoza felt ignored during the earlier years of Sandinista rule. In turn, they opposed the implementation of the Literacy Crusade, deeming it a waste of national resources (Arnove 254). Resistance also came from the Catholic priests and Protestant ministers, who found the campaign to be “too political and too secular” (Dodson 25). Inspired by the idea of a literate Nicaragua, though, these church officials began teaching their own literacy lessons, using the Bible as a literacy text (Arnove 255). The Sandinista government did not oppose this personal interpretation of the Crusade on the part of the church. In lesson 22 of the primer, the FSLN decreed religious freedom for all denominations that defended the interests of the people of Nicaragua. Therefore, to promote the continued spread of literacy skills, the Crusade leadership chose not to fight the growing critique and resistance on the part of the church.

Taking into account both the outcomes and critiques of the Literacy Crusade, few reject the success of the campaign. Over the course of five months, the Sandinista party managed to mobilize more than half of the country in a meaningful and unified way. In turn, a new form of nationalism emerged, one that was founded on the ideals of the “bandit turned hero”, Augusto Cesar Sandino. Marginalization was diminished alongside rates of illiteracy. Populations that were once disadvantaged were finally considered valuable by the government. And a new, decentralized approach to teaching literacy was finally exemplified on the global stage. Unfortunately, the work of the Sandinistas was destined to disappear, Sandino would be “erased” along with the Crusade itself, and the population would regress to an illiterate state.
The fall of Sandino... Again

The re-re-definition of Sandino, so to speak, demonstrated Sandino’s importance in the construction of a Nicaraguan identity. In 1990, the Sandinista party lost control of Nicaragua just as easily as it had been taken in 1979. Once again, the idea of Sandino as a national hero posed a threat to the incoming government. The 1980s had not been a particularly peaceful time for Nicaragua, the civil unrest that characterized its history before Somoza had returned in the form of the Contra War, an effort mounted through the United States encouragement and support (Williams 23). Growing dismay in the FSLN leadership, fueled by a questionable 1984 election, contributed to the conservative victory in the election of 1990 (Close 2). The National Union of the Opposition, or UNO, under the leadership of Violeta Chamorro won in a landslide victory and successfully ousted the Sandinista party (Williams 23). This change of power was a unique one in the context of Nicaraguan history, however, for the first time, the population was in a better place socially, as many took to heart the ideals of the Revolutionary government and continued to fight for political freedom and constitutional democracy. At the same time, the country was economically the same, if not worse off than it was at the start of Sandinista control (Close 8). The UNO faced the unique challenge of dismantling the revolutionary government, reinstating old policies, while also redefining that nationalist identity, which included redefining Sandino.

This redefinition process is best described as a “cleansing”. In fact, “with the UNO coalition’s 1990 electoral victory, the Chamorro administration set out to erase Sandinista ideology from the schools” (Arnove 33). FSLN textbooks were recalled and heavily edited. Nicaraguan culture at the time was considered to become heavily censored and highly conservative (Whisnant 447). Artistic pursuits, nationalist billboards, and experiential learning were all considered threats

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36 If we consider Somoza’s first “redefinition” and then the FSLN’s “redefinition” during the Crusade.
to the Chamorro administration and quickly disintegrated into the past as the Sandinista policies and practices were dismantled (Arguello Vargas 48). Sandino was no longer presented as the national hero and Fonseca became a dissenter instead of a revolutionary (Close 15). “Erasing Sandino” from Nicaraguan history meant the erasing of the National Literacy Crusade, the work of Cardenal and his fellow Educational Ministers, and the forward thinking notions of Sandinista Revolutionaries. As the country tries to find its way through continuing change and turmoil, the Literacy Crusade, once forgotten by the turn of the century, has been revisited. Today, scholars look to the lessons, outcomes, and critiques of the campaign to further understand literacy, especially when it pertains to nation building. In conjunction with other campaigns of the 20th century, the Nicaraguan example helps us further understand the idea of “literacy” and what it means to mount a campaign to promote it.
Figure 1. El amanecer del pueblo example lesson page

Ejercicio C

1.- Leamos la oración:

La Reforma Agraria recupera la producción de la tierra para el pueblo.

2.- Leamos la palabra:

   tierra

3.- Sepáremos la palabra en sílabas:

   tie  ra

4.- Leamos las sílabas:

   ra  ro  re  mu  ra

5.- Leamos y escribamos las sílabas:

   ra  ro  re  mu  ra

   re  mi  ro  mu

6.- Formemos y escribamos palabras combinando las sílabas conocidas:

   [espacios para escribir]

This sample exercise from the workbook, El Amanecer del Pueblo, introduces a sentence to the student, its theme building on topics and ideas presented earlier by pictures and short readings. The student focuses on a particular word, its syllables, and a certain phonemic family. After writing those syllables in the workbook, the student then reads and uses them to write words and sentences.
Chapter 4: THEORY

What does it All Mean? A Theoretical Understanding

*Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope. It is a tool for daily life in modern society. It is a bulwark against poverty, and a building block of development, an essential complement to investments in roads, dams, clinics and factories. Literacy is a platform for democratization, and a vehicle for the promotion of cultural and national identity. Literacy is, finally, the road to human progress and the means through which every man, woman and child can realize his or her full potential.* - Kofi Annan

Introduction

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO), one in five individuals worldwide is illiterate, and more than 27 countries continue to report mass illiteracy rates (Wickens & Sandlin 276). The international “literacy crisis” is nothing if not alarming. Literacy, as Kofi Annan asserts above, has always been considered a means of progress and development. Therefore, the lack of literacy is a startling occurrence, given its social, cultural, and political implications. In times of crisis, it is necessary to fully understand the problem before proposing a solution. This body of work is aimed at being one of said solutions. Over the course of the 20th century, the world has witnessed some of the greatest undertakings meant to fight the crisis, particularly within the Spanish-speaking world. For the purpose of further understanding the successes and shortcomings of such undertakings, I have presented the three case studies of the Spanish Pedagogical Missions (1931-1936), the Cuban National Literacy Campaign (1961), and the Nicaraguan National Literacy Crusade (1980). The goal of the following chapter is twofold: one, to summarize common ties between all three literacy initiatives; and two, to characterize some of the prominent, common successes of the campaigns in order to identify
qualities that contribute to a beneficial campaign so that we may consider these qualities when structuring future literacy campaigns. I recognize that each campaign has had its faults and critiques, which I have addressed on an individual basis for each. While these critiques cannot be forgotten, my goal is to propose the necessary “next steps” instead of further dwelling on the critiques, though I do suggest they do not stray far from our awareness in the development of future campaigns; I simply assert that these shortcomings have been fully addressed to this point.

The three case studies presented in this study are by no means the only and the best examples of literacy campaigns during the 20th century, and so I would like to provide a note here on selection bias and my conclusions drawn from it. First, my primary goal was to explore literacy movements within the Spanish-speaking world, both due to my familiarity with the cultural landscape of this subset of the population, and my desire to limit potential extraneous variables led me to conclude that a shared language might be beneficial. Many texts that were either available to me or shared (if at all) between nations during their campaigns were in either Spanish or English, and in this way some texts were more easily compared. By seeking a population that shared a language, I could also attempt to limit some of the differences that arise cultural due to language differences. Within this subset, why Spain, Cuba, and Nicaragua? First, these were the countries with histories and cultures that I was familiar. Additionally, these were the countries with the largest amount of information, most widely recognized as literacy advocates (due to their movements), and greatest potential for support for my research from William & Mary faculty. After studying the three campaigns extensively, I inductively propose the following benefit of studying these three particular cases studies in conjunction with one another (see Figure 2. for a representational diagram): Spain’s campaign developed in near total isolation, without influence from other countries and without influencing other movements later. It can be said that it
organically developed as an “outlier.” Cuba, the next movement chronologically, developed wholly independently of the Spanish movement, excluding Spain’s imperial history with Cuba. Nicaragua, however, was directly influenced by Cuba and other external sources. Therefore, we have three cases that interrelate differently. If similarities arise, and they do, between Spain and Cuba/Nicaragua, they become all the more interesting because they developed separately and organically from one another. Additionally, if Cuba and Nicaragua demonstrate similarities that were successful, then it validates an ideology or practice that much more. Therefore, the case studies present a unique scope, especially when comparisons are involved. Any bias introduced by my selection process can then be viewed as minimal.

Figure 2. Representational Diagram of How to Organize of the Case Studies

With all of this in mind, the three case studies independently demonstrate the following: how national history may create a need for a literacy campaign, what goes into a literacy campaign,
possible successes, and possible shortcomings. All of this has been addressed in earlier chapters.

The three case studies together present an interesting cross section to interrogate the following: what literacy is, why it’s important, common/valuable pedagogy, prerequisites for a campaign, and unique characteristics, all of which will be covered in this chapter. To facilitate and contextualize the following conclusions, each literacy movement has been briefly summarized and repackaged (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Summary Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spain</th>
<th>Cuba</th>
<th>Nicaragua</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context:</strong> 1931 - 1936, Misiones Pedagógicas, enacted by the Second Republic in order to combat a state of near “feudal” conditions in the Spanish countryside.</td>
<td><strong>Context:</strong> 1961, National Literacy Campaign (The Year of Education), enacted by the Revolutionary Government</td>
<td><strong>Context:</strong> 1980, National Literacy Crusade, enacted by the Sandinista Revolutionary Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Significant Player(s):</strong> Manuel Bartolome Cossío</td>
<td><strong>Significant Player(s):</strong> Che Guevara, Fidel Castro</td>
<td><strong>Significant Player(s):</strong> Fernando Cardenal, Paulo Freire, *Sandino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definition of Literacy:</strong> Cultural Literacy, *Functional Literacy</td>
<td><strong>Definition of Literacy:</strong> Political, Critical, Emancipatory Literacy, *Functional Literacy</td>
<td><strong>Definition of Literacy:</strong> Political, Critical, Emancipatory Literacy, *Functional Literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Literacy Rates:</strong> 50% → 70%</td>
<td><strong>Literacy Rates:</strong> 58% → 100%</td>
<td><strong>Literacy Rates:</strong> 48% → 88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lessons:</strong> Use of popular education, use of multiple approaches, the mobilization of students</td>
<td><strong>Lessons:</strong> Defining popular education, primer design, political will/revolutionary agenda, “analytic-synthetic” pedagogy, continued post-campaign efforts</td>
<td><strong>Lessons:</strong> Dual primer, application of popular education, nation building, revolutionary agenda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critiques:</strong> No true pedagogy, political agenda, too short lived, not heavily mobilized</td>
<td><strong>Critiques:</strong> Resistance to the campaign, casualties, socialist agenda</td>
<td><strong>Critiques:</strong> Short lived, questionable definition of literacy rates, regressed to illiteracy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Meanings of Literacy

The term literacy has become a universal buzzword. Since 1946, literacy has internationally been recognized as “a human right and the basis for lifelong learning” (UNESCO).

When countries begin to evaluate and report their development status, they present statistics
thought to be the most revealing of societal norms, quality of life, and social advancement. Many times, these countries rely on the statistics regarding the gross domestic product (GDP), infant mortality rate, and literacy rate. This places intrinsic value on the idea of literacy, enforces the notion of literacy as a human right, and promotes literacy as a national resource; all of which begs the question: why? Why is literacy so commonly reported with national monetary and health appraisals? For a long while, theories on western modernization have assumed an existent link between literacy and economic success, as literacy acquisition was viewed as a direct precursor to major cognitive, political, social, and cultural transformations (Graff 17). Herein lies the literacy myth: the belief that the ability to read, especially on a national scale, directly yields economic and social success (Graff 324). This myth has been perpetuated for decades, if not centuries. At times, the myth can be individually or partially true, but the link by no means possesses a “literacy = success” relationship (Graff 19). Historical instances prove the inadequacy of this proposed link and further support the idea of the myth.

Harvey Graff (1991) and James Paul Gee (2015) point to Sweden as the most salient example of the literacy myth. At the close of the 18th century, Sweden had done the unthinkable: it had eradicated illiteracy (Gee 28). In the wake of the Protestant Reformation throughout Europe, the Swedish church decided to educate its population in order to promote the reading of the Bible, declaring through The Church Law of 1686 that everyone, including women, children, and servants, would “learn to read and see with their own eyes what God bids and commands in his holy word” (Graff xxiv). The church, without the help of formal education, realized the goal of universal literacy, equally among men and women alike (Graff xxv). It is argued, however, that the population was taught in such a way that the church dictated how it should read each word “correctly” (Gee 30). In doing so, the population still could not think critically and question what
they read, relying on interpretations presented to them. Sweden had achieved a more or less “mindless” form of literacy. Regardless, the achievement at the time was remarkable and “by the tenets of the literacy myth, Sweden should have been an international example of modernization, social equality, economic development, and cognitive growth” (Gee 29). Yet the country remained “a land of widespread poverty”, still lacking any formal schooling and any significant economic development (Gee 29). Reading the written word did not yield national success, invalidating the link championed by the myth.

We must therefore begin to view literacy as a means of connecting with social and historical contexts in order to promote population or national success. The power and influence of literacy is wholly dependent on various determining and mediating factors (Graff 19). In shattering the literacy myth, however, we have only realized the next greatest challenge. If we continue to see the benefit and power of literacy, thus reporting literacy rates along with GDP and infant mortality rates, then we must agree upon a definition of literacy. A deceptively simplistic question, “what is literacy?”, has opened a complex debate over the past several decades (Keefe & Copeland 92; Yagelski 28). In turn, this debate leaves behind a transient and unclear definition of the word literacy. Take for instance the fact that even a Merriam Webster Dictionary provides an ineffectual definition that leaves the seeker still unable to understand the word’s true meaning: literacy - \ˈli-t(ə-)ra-sē\ - the quality or state of being literate. The lack of a cohesive and agreed upon definition not only proves to be a challenge among literacy scholars but promotes the dissemination of imprecise data, at best (Hillerich 51). If we cannot agree what it means to be literate or illiterate, how are we to understand literacy or illiteracy rates when countries or organizations such as UNESCO publish their reports? Illiteracy rates have come to report anything from lacking the total ability to read, to lacking an education beyond year four, to lacking the ability to socially perform
given insufficient reading or writing skills (Hillerich 50). Literacy rates, in turn, have come report anything from being able to sign one’s own name, to read and write, to pass a written reading comprehension test at a level comparable to that achieved by an average 4th grade student (Harste 9). These indescrepencies and shortcomings created vacancies that allowed several scholars to propose various definitions for literacy, some of the most prominent being: functional literacy, autonomous literacy, cultural literacy, critical literacy, political literacy, and emancipatory literacy. In theory, each one presents its own merit. Through the use of the three previously presented literacy case studies of Spain, Cuba, and Nicaragua, I will to present a conclusion on the “in practice” merits of each: understanding how the country defined literacy, which definition of literacy is most pertinent to the country’s success, and how the country provided an example of definition-based implementation.

Functional literacy has, by and large, been the most widely accepted definition of literacy. Coined during World War II by the United States Army, “functional literacy”, synonymous with “basic literacy”, was understood as "the capability to understand instructions necessary for conducting basic military functions ... [in essence at a] fifth grade reading level” (Sharon 148). As a common referent, this definition became a more generalized concept, focusing primarily on the ability to read and write in order to promote survival (De Castell 12). Functional literacy excluded social constraints and variables, and included only the formalist notion of literacy as a skill set (De Castell 13). In essence, a functional literacy approach would deem a person “literate” if he or she could answer, “yes”, to the questions: Can you read? And can you write? However, when considering functional literacy, it is absolutely essential that a researcher or reporter clearly state
the “reading level” at which an individual achieves functional literacy (Kirsch & Guthrie 504). As functional literacy developed into the most prominent form of literacy, it quickly became associated with the traditional, skill-based model of technocratic pedagogy (De Castell & Luke 1988).

Technocratic pedagogy arose out of a need to make education more scientific. Using developmental psychology, literacy and learning were “scientifically dissected” into teachable and testable sub-skill units (De Castell & Luke 170). Under technocratic ideals, “students are diagnosed, prescribed for, treated and checked before proceeding to the next level of instruction” (Grabill 25). The approach is characterized by a strict emphasis on rules, clearly delineating what one must and must not do while reading and writing (Giroux 292). This applied scientific assessment of student skills encouraged a less-individualized teaching style once preliminary “diagnoses” were made as “prescriptions” became generalized and highly packaged curricula, especially in North American school systems (Grabill 25). The pedagogy ascribes to a highly cognitive model and upholds the belief that all learners approach reading with the same cognitive capacity (Giroux 293). In such, students are generalized and skills become viewed as “neutral” (Grabill 25). The formalist definition of functional literacy in conjunction with the formalist approach of technocratic pedagogy has created an easily accessible and usable conception of literacy. It is, however, narrow, limited, and regimented in comparison to other perspectives and theories.

In the 1980s, literacy theorists began to critique the definition of functional literacy within various social, cultural, institutional, and historical contexts. As a result, a body of research termed

37 Typically ascribed to a formal “grade level”, as there are implicit requirements for vocabulary acquisitions and sentence construction understanding necessary to read at varying levels.
“New Literacy Studies” emerged (Gee 54). New Literacy Studies (NLS) stresses the plurality of literacy, especially as it applies to cultural and social practices tied to print, and emphasizes a connection between society and the mind, making literacy a sociocultural phenomenon (Gee 63). The scope of literacy has been broadened beyond skill-acquisition. In fact, Gallego and Hollingsworth (2000) decided to “challenge the school standard of literacy” and fully elaborated a “multiple literacies” theory. Through various collaborations, they conceived literacy in three general forms:

- **school literacies** - the learning of interpretive and communicative processes needed to adapt socially to school and other dominant language contexts, and the use or practice of those processes in order to gain a conceptual understanding of school subjects
- **community literacies** - the appreciation, understanding, and/or use of interpretive and communicative traditions of culture and community, which sometimes stand as critiques of school literacies
- **personal literacies** - the critical awareness of ways of knowing and believing about self that comes from thoughtful examination of historical or experiential and gender-specific backgrounds in school and community language settings, which sometimes stands as critique of both school literacies and community literacies” (Gallego & Hollingsworth 5).

As a result, the New Literacy Studies “entails the recognition of multiple literacies, varying according to time and space, but also contested in relations of power. NLS, then, takes nothing for granted with respect to literacy and the social practices with which it becomes associated, problematizing what counts as literacy at any time and place and asking “whose literacies” are dominant and whose are marginalized or resistant” (Street 77). Considering literacy as something much more than a “generic” skill, the New Literacy Studies inserts itself in the debate surrounding
the importance of literacy. In the process, many scholars have attempted to study, theorize, and describe the various forms of multiple literacies that exist and can exist when we use the general term, “literacy”. The following examples provide an insight into some of the emergent theories developed under the tenets of the New Literacy Studies as a response to a dissatisfaction with the idea of generalized functional literacy.

The theory of autonomous literacy is one of the earliest developed within New Literacy Studies, and its commonalities with early functional literacy reveal its early emergence, straddling both old and new conceptions of literacy. Theorists of autonomous literacy believe that writing happens within an individual set of historical and social contexts. As a form of living memory then, writing becomes the solidified embodiment of discourse given publication date and author (Street 5). The reader becomes literate when he or she can identify this discourse and interact with it on a personal level, outside of the reader’s given social and cultural contexts (Street & Street 76). While clearly different from functional literacy in that it considers the external pressures acting on the author and affecting the discourse generated to create subsequent literacy, the autonomous model is highly contested, especially under a post-structuralist critique. Foucault proposes that an autonomous model over-privileges the author and under-privileges the reader (117). In a post-structuralist context, the perspective “de-centers writing as well as the self, seeing both as not only the effect of language patterns but as the result of multiple discourses” that can be viewed continually under multiple discourses (Clifford 40). As a result of early autonomous literacy efforts, New Literacy Studies began to generate more context specific, general audience (community instead of individual) based theories of literacy, what emerge as “ideological models”.

Cultural literacy emerges as the first of such models. A direct antithesis of the autonomous theory of literacy, cultural literacy values the external contexts in which communities exist and
how they interpret a reading (as opposed to valuing the author) (Hirsch 166). To be literate in this sense therefore means that as a reader, there is a sound understanding of the meanings ascribed to various signs, idioms, and discourses presented in a given text (Hirsch 168). So, beyond the acquired skill of reading, cultural literacy requires an ability to interpret the signs as they are presented. This was the first heavily context-based theory to be proposed, valuing the specific role of culture and the need to understand culture in order to be literate. Critics believe, however, that this should not be over-generalized. For instance, promoting literacy in “American culture” as a whole would mean devaluing local and regional cultures (Bizzell 662). This creates a hierarchical value system ascribed to different cultural discourse structures or sign interpretation systems, which many times promote the dominant or hegemonic culture (Gallego & Hollingsworth 20). Therefore, when applying cultural literacy, we must recognize that there exist multiple cultures within which one can be literate. More holistic and inclusive than its counterparts, cultural literacy invited even more considerations towards the sociocultural contexts that create and promote literacy.

Just a cultural literacy requires the learner to understand the cultural contexts of what he or she reads, critical literacy requires a similar outward gaze. Critical literacy is defined as "learning to read and write as part of the process of becoming conscious of one's experience as historically constructed within specific power relations" (Anderson and Irvine 82). As such, critical literacy is an act of resistance against dominating and hegemonic forces (Shor 3). Becoming critically literate requires a sense of historical, cultural, and social background, in the past, present, and future as it relates to the learner (Shor 3). With a particularly Marxist approach, critical literacy situates the learner in the context of language, experience, and power, and requires the reader to understand their position in the interplay between all three (McLaren 49). Work done to understand critical
literacy has identified four key components of this type of competency’s development: (1) disrupting the commonplace, (2) interrogating multiple viewpoints, (3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (4) taking action and promoting social justice (Lewison 382). In a dialogical sense, developing this competency allows those who become literate to place themselves in the dyad that is center vs. periphery, dominant vs. marginalized (McLaren 51). The introduction of critical literacy provides the first truly all-encompassing social literacy, fortified by social power dynamics and steeped in action. Literacy was no longer just a skillset but a way to live. The sensitive and conscious viewpoint that is expected of the critically literate is seen in political and emancipatory literacy as well.

As an offshoot of critical literacy, Giroux proposes political literacy. Situated within the “broader politics of difference and democracy”, political literacy is “an ethical address of how we structure relationships” and how construct a socially-engaged community that takes into consideration all members and dismantles dangerous hierarchical structures (Giroux 3). In becoming literate, learners can use experience to situate themselves according to power and social network ties in order to better understand their world and read given texts or situations (Giroux 4). Giroux’s emphasis on ethics and democracy is the driving force that politicizes his ideals regarding literacy ideology. While some might instinctively declare political literacy as the competency to understand politics and its discourse, it is in fact the competency of situating oneself with respect to politics and demanding a more democratic treatment, if it is not yet forthcoming. Social action is again vital to this theory on literacy. Emancipatory literacy becomes the all-encompassing ideology that considers both the political and the critical.

38 See description of Bakhtin’s dialogics: Ball 2004
Emancipatory literacy is the full development of literacy as a “lifestyle” and adds on to the relevant work done in critical and political literacy. In his seminal text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire describes what it means to undergo conscientization, or *conscientização*: “an awakening of critical consciousness that leads the way to the expression of social discontents precisely because these discontents are real components of an oppressive situation” (Freire 36). Stressing the critical worldview that critical literacy hopes literates will adopt, emancipatory literacy goes one step further and hopes to liberate the literates. Freire recognized the need to understand both the word and the world in which the word exists. By understanding both, and not forgetting that “reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world”, those who become literate can situate themselves in the oppressed-oppressor continuum and ideally reach a point where they can dismantle the detrimental hierarchy (Macedo & Freire 35). In this way, emancipatory literacy encourages a competency in understanding all forms of external social contexts, reading texts with these contexts in mind, and ultimately seeking liberation. Learners must not only depend on teachers to learn, but must utilize their own preexisting agency in order to develop more (Macedo & Freire 23). Popular education, a theory also outlined by Freire, is the direct complement, or even applied pedagogy, of emancipatory literacy. Hegemonic and dominant cultures are nearly unavoidable. Through emancipatory literacy, however, we hope to diminish the oppressive nature of these cultures and support a more just social and cultural climate. Emancipatory literacy is perhaps the most all-encompassing and fully developed form of literacy under the New Literacy Studies movement. However, it has gained the least support as it would require drastic changes within school curricula. The implementation of such processes and pedagogies could be tremendously beneficial in
fostering diverse and more just social situations. With all of this in mind, where do the three presented case studies fall? How do they define literacy and why does that matter?

Spain, Cuba, and Nicaragua present some of the most prominent examples of literacy initiatives during the 20th century in the Spanish speaking world. With a heightened sense now of what “literacy” means, it is possible to further evaluate these case studies. First and foremost it is important to highlight that all three case studies present their literacy rates with respect to functional literacy. Currently, no standards exist to measure cultural, critical, or emancipatory literacy rates, forcing those who wish to report any figures to base them on measurable skills. In the case of Spain, functional literacy was defined as the ability to read one of the selections from a travelling library. Cuba and Nicaragua presented a “literacy test” to gauge the level of functional literacy, completing the final stage of the primer and in the case of Cuba sending Fidel Castro a “thank you” note. Again, we find the intrinsic imprecision of measuring functional literacy. Because all three countries reported the success of each campaign using individualized metrics, the ~40% increase in Cuban literacy rates is only roughly comparable to the ~35% increase in Nicaraguan literacy rates, for instance. This problem of comparability is unavoidable until parameters can be standardized, something which cannot happen overnight as many factors need to be accommodated and questions of validity in varying cultural/national contexts arise. Until then, the measure of functional literacy, individually defined, will have to suffice. Comparisons can only be made sparingly therefore when looking at numeric results.

Despite measuring functional literacy, each literacy movement stressed at least one of the literacy forms outlined by the New Literacy Studies. The multifaceted approach of the Spanish Misiones Pedagógicas places value on cultural literacy. At the time, the countryside was considered “near feudal” in comparison to its urban counterparts. As a result, a Spain lacked a
shared culture and identity. Missionaries emphasized experiential learning through engaging with film, text, art, and music, all of which introduced the rural population to “culture”. This introduction created a competency in their national culture that Spaniards had before lacked. Many rural learners were at first uneasy with the Missions, because they deemphasized the importance of chores and work (moving away from “generic/survival” functional literacy), but were advised by the Missionaries that literacy is a multifaceted entity meant to be used (in work) but also enjoyed (in pleasure). At the same time, the Missions exemplified an early attempt at critical literacy, for learners and Missionaries alike. Both became aware of the social and political contexts in which they lived, the power dynamics that existed, and the existence of dominant and oppressed culture. The newfound awareness diminished the power of the dominant culture among the Missionaries as they developed a respect the existence of a peasant culture. While the Missions employed early forms of experience-based popular education techniques, it does not yet reach emancipatory literacy, as the Missionaries still went out to the countryside to educate, not liberate, the people. Instead, literacy movements such as the Campaign in Cuba and the Crusade in Nicaragua have been some of the well-developed examples of critical and emancipatory literacy.

While the historical contexts of all three movements (to be discussed in the coming sections) were extremely similar in that there was a significant change of government power that afforded implementation of a literacy movement, Cuba and Nicaragua were truly fighting revolutions through their campaigns. In Cuba, Guevara and Castro confronted a 400+ year history of failing education and constant foreign leadership (Spain then the United States). In Nicaragua, the FSLN combatted a 40+ year history of dictatorial rule. As a result, both found a need to sensitize and liberate the masses that had been neglected by those in power prior to each revolutionary government. While inherently socialist - given the background of Guevara and
Castro - the Cuban movement was the first attempt at emancipatory literacy and popular education (despite lacking these formal titles for what they were doing). *Alfabeticemos* and *Venceremos* taught the Cuban population about the new government, their rights within the government, and what it meant to be “Cuban.” In doing so, the brigadistas and learners alike developed a critical consciousness of their place within the newly developed Cuban society, one that would continue well beyond the close of the Campaign. Using popular education and experience-based learning to promote agency and self-sufficiency, the Cuban Campaign exemplifies an effort to develop the necessary liberating efficacy among the people. In a similar manner, the Nicaraguan Crusade used primers and constant press/radio announcements to include the people in the new and forming revolutionary government. With advice from Paulo Freire, the Nicaraguan Crusade could precisely situate itself in the field of popular education and emancipatory literacy, done in a very similar way (but nationally individualized) to that of Cuba. Yet, how can one measure liberation? Until we can answer that question, we can only look to the goals and implementation practices of each campaign to fully decide whether or not they were efforts in emancipatory literacy. Because the primers do promote a critical consciousness and the actions taken to educate the masses were inclusive, nonhierarchical, and grounded in social contexts, we can say that both movements were efforts in emancipatory literacy.

“Literacy” is a deceptively complicated term. As I have outlined above, literacy can encompass an array of competencies. Through a heightened sense of what these various definitions are, we can further evaluate any effort on the part of literacy, such is the case for Spain, Cuba, and Nicaragua. In practice, each exemplified a different form of literacy under the umbrella of New Literacy Studies, while all of them still ascribed to the basic notions of early functional literacy. Despite significant improvements in defining the term, much work must still be done both in
defining and quantifying what it means to be literate. Examples such as the three case studies provide evidence for this need as well as evidence that more refined literacy competencies beyond basic skills can be demonstrated for learners. As the field continues to grow, these case studies will help inform the future implementation of other literacy campaigns as we attempt to continue the fight for emancipatory literacy. Under the banner of emancipatory literacy, the literacy myth might in fact not be a myth at all. I continue to believe that there are indeed factors that serve as intermediate points between achieving literacy and national success. However, emancipatory literacy encompasses all of these intermediate and social factors. In promoting emancipatory literacy, we might just overcome various forms of oppression and in turn realize the success, by way of literacy, everyone has so hoped for over centuries of history.

In addition to demonstrating that emancipatory literacy, supported for now by other definitions of literacy (such as functional when trying to report measured growth), the three case studies of literacy movements have demonstrated the necessary components for a literacy movement. In the sections that follow, I will integrate the lessons and critiques of each campaign so that we can understand the broader implications of the three in conjunction with one another.

“Literacy as…”: The Metaphors We Learn By

As evidenced by all three campaigns, ownership and “buy in” on the part of large portions of the population are necessary for implementing successful or large scale campaigns such as the Spanish Missions, Cuban Campaign, or the Nicaraguan Crusade. Whether in the case of the Spanish Missions in which university students and teachers were quickly mobilized under Cossío or the case of the Cuban Campaign and Nicaraguan Crusade when all those with sufficient literacy skills left home and school for training by the government, masses were drawn to the literacy efforts. Throughout the course of this investigation, I have found that ownership was primarily
established through implementation of a shared, definable goal for each movement. Each goal was
easily understandable and nicely packaged so that many could connect to it. Additionally, a well-
defined, well-communicated goal could serve as a constant reminder of what the campaign hoped
to accomplish and a persistent motivator for the misioneros or brigadistas that took to the
countryside. I propose that the primary goal of each campaign can be simplified into an
individualized conceptual metaphor. Each metaphor stood to define, legitimize, and promote the
work done within the constraints of each movement.

To understand this defining, legitimizing, and promoting force, it is necessary to
understand conceptual metaphors. In 1980, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson published the
groundbreaking *Metaphors We Live By*, in which they outlined the early stages of conceptual
metaphor theory as we know it. Asserting that language is the physical embodiment of our
conceptual system, which is “fundamentally metaphorical in nature” in terms of how we think and
act, Lakoff and Johnson believe that metaphor is central to our construction and perception of the
world (3). The application of metaphor is extremely useful in the sense that it compares abstract
ideas or things to more concrete ones in the hopes of “understanding and experiencing one kind of
thing in terms of another” (Lakoff & Johnson 5). Not only do we use metaphor to personally
understand and construct our worldview, but on a community level “we draw inferences, set goals,
make commitments, and execute plans, all on the basis of how we in part structure our experience,
consciously and unconsciously, by means of metaphor” (Lakoff & Johnson 158). Thus, using a
consolidated metaphor allowed each nation and government to rally support around the necessary

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39 For instance, “theories are buildings” as metaphor. Theories being the abstract and buildings being the concrete. In
order to understand theories and what they do in a more concrete fashion, the language we apply to discussing theories
allows us to perpetuate and utilize the metaphor. Consider: “Is that the foundation for your theory? The theory needs
more support. The argument is shaky. We need some facts or the argument will fall apart. We need to construct a
strong argument for that. The argument collapsed” (Lakoff & Johnson 46).
inferences, goals, commitments, and plans for each movement to be successful. I argue that each metaphor not only establishes the goal of the campaign but further demonstrates the value ascribed to literacy and the definitional framework each country operated under during the movement.

I believe that under the following metaphors the Spaniards, Cubans, and Nicaraguans constructed beliefs regarding literacy that caused more than 50% of each country to participate in each respective movement:

- **Literacy as culture.** Spain, embracing various aspects of cultural literacy, spent much more time, energy, and resources than most comparable campaigns collecting and advocating the appreciation of more than just the written word. Through traveling museums, circulating libraries, music, choirs, theaters, and movie showings, the Pedagogical Missions exemplified the plurality of literacy. School metrics were non-existent throughout the Mission as missionaries were encouraged to advocate for the pleasure to be found in culture and even the Spanish unity to be found in culture (Rodriguez Corredoira 83). Differing social situations in the rural and urban zones of the country required a unity of culture, as most recognized themselves as “Spanish” but beyond that had varying descriptions and notions of their shared cultural identity.

- **Literacy as battle.** Rebecca Herman astutely assessed that in the Cuban discourse, the Literacy Campaign is viewed in the context of a battle (102). With terms like “brigadista” and “*Venceremos*”, all images of and discussions on the campaign equated the literacy efforts with the revolution. Castro himself announced that, “the battle that defeats ignorance will give our country more glory than any military battle we have waged so far, or any military battle we shall wage in the future … Just as much heroism is needed to defeat illiteracy as it is to defeat mercenaries of imperialism” (Herman 103). Idealized
almost to a point beyond the military soldiers, the literacy brigadistas became evermore militarized as “illiteracy” and “ignorance” became villainized and equated to defeat. Whereas many believe that the infamous cries of “¡Venceremos!” and “¡Patria o muerte!” referred to the Revolution, many were born during the National Literacy Campaign. Literacy truly became a battle that Cuba wanted to and had to win. Victory during the Revolution only inspired Campaign participants to seek the same victory during the literacy movement.

- **Literacy as nation (or national identity).** While the Nicaraguan educational team took a very similar approach in comparison to Cuba, I would argue that their use of “brigadista” and battle related terms were not as salient as they were in Cuba. Instead, the metaphor that distinguishes the Nicaraguan efforts considers literacy the equivalent of nation and identity as necessary to create one. As previously examined, the Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade represented an opportunity to unify the pockets of marginalized Nicaraguans and assemble a unified Nicaraguan identity. In recreating Sandino as a national hero, the FSLN redefined the history that had so long been disseminated through formal education in Nicaragua. This reimagining of the nation and its history facilitated new dialogues, new sense of belonging, and new identity. The importance of this metaphor is evident in the fact that after the Crusade, FSLN efforts were directed towards maintaining the national identity augmented during the effort instead of maintaining the functional literacy skills.

Through these metaphors, I propose that the governments and organizations behind each movement could gain support and promote their cause. In addition, the metaphors grounded each campaign and its values. The metaphor clearly defines the goals that will most be promoted by the movement and explains why one campaign will view maintaining functional literacy as important
while another will not. This approach to conceptualizing the literacy campaigns, while somewhat unorthodox, has been applied to understanding literacy in general. In defining the polemic debate on the true definition of literacy, especially under the guises of the emergent New Literacy Studies, Sylvia Scribner, a highly respected literacy theorist, imagines literacy as: adaptation, power, and a state of grace (Scribner 8). The application of conceptual metaphor allowed both Scribner and me to understand the literacy questions at hand and also to construct more succinct and descriptive conceptions of each. While not explicit during the movements, I conclude that the implicit promotion of these metaphors throughout all three campaigns was essential in securing each its successes. Therefore, metaphors are not just things we live by (according to Lakoff & Johnson), but they are what we learn by (or more precisely acquire literacy by). The following sections reveal that conceptual metaphors were also supplemented by other campaign qualities or actions that further contributed to success.

**Beyond the “Banking Model”: Popular Education and Continued Support**

The question of, “How does one even begin to teach literacy to the masses?”, is perhaps one of the more daunting challenges various players in the three movements have had to handle. Traditionally, we view literacy as an acquired and cultivated skill, something that primary school helps us develop over time. However, when you boldly tell the UN that in a year’s time you will govern a totally literate nation, the luxury of time is not at your disposal. When you only have five months until the end of your crusade, cultivation of skills is not a term that is likely in your discourse. Thus, pedagogy is key: effective, well-thought out teaching styles are essential to accomplish a task as lofty as a national literacy campaign. Additionally, when the goal is an

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40 Fidel Castro’s 1960 UN Hearing Address
41 Fernando Cardenal in Nicaragua
emancipatory form of literacy, this pedagogy is even more critical to the development of widespread critical consciousness. As a result, all three cases demonstrate the organic assumption that popular education is the movement’s primary pedagogy.

Popular education, a term originally coined by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is an alternative teaching style that values experience, promotes a critical consciousness, and opposes “traditional teaching styles”. This pedagogy arose out of a discontent with the traditional “banking model” approach that had become so commonplace in the field of education. Freire describes and critiques the model in a stepwise fashion: First, there is the teacher, “his task is to "fill" the students with the contents of his narration— contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and that could give them significance”. Second, there are students who must, “memorize mechanically the narrated content, turning them into "containers," into "receptacles" to be "filled" by the teacher”. Third, there is education, which “becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat” (Freire 72). Popular education arises out of a need to ground education in prior experience, to develop a partnership between a coordinator and a participant instead of a teacher and a student, and to empower these participants to recognize their social situation in the context of learning or developing a critical consciousness. Instead of the traditional authoritarian approach, in popular education learning becomes a much more democratic process. When participants are guided through an education by someone who both recognizes their autonomy but introduces them to more diverse experiences, building on to prior experience, they undergo a concerted cultivation. This not only strengthens their autonomy and self-efficacy while learning, but it helps them understand the social order and how to change
situations that are detrimental to them (Lareau 5). Concerted cultivation works best when educators take on the role of cultural worker and practice humility, decisiveness, joy of life, and tolerance (Freire 210). Popular education is inherently emancipatory and, following tenets such as these, becomes a highly beneficial form of literacy building. The three chosen case studies present examples of popular education before, during, and after the theory was constructed.

Popular education was not a term utilized in the field of education when the Pedagogical Missions commenced in 1931. However, we are able to consider them a practice of popular education in that Cossío explicitly mentions the virtue of experience-based, active, and at times outdoor learning that strays from the in-classroom, typically rote memorization type of learning that had been so common in the Spanish education system. Che Guevara developed his notions on the importance of experience, critical consciousness, and student autonomy during his literacy classes for guerrillas in the Sierra Maestras, which happened at about the same time Freire began making his own observations of learning in the classroom. Finally, Nicaragua invited Paulo Freire to advise them on the implementation of their Crusade and development of their primers. Whether consciously, as in the case of Nicaragua, or organically, as in the case of Spain and Cuba, popular education emerges as the dominant pedagogy for all three. Thus, it is with some certainty I assert that nontraditional teaching models are essential for large-scale literacy movements.

While more work would need to be done to understand the mechanisms for why this is the case, I believe that there are several characteristics of popular education that make it a successful pedagogy. First, it values the learner no matter what stage of education in which they find themselves, learners are much more comfortable and self-confident when their own experience is important to the process. Second, popular education values reading the “word and the world”. Because of this, learners actively witness the applicability of literacy and learning. Finally, the
democratic nature of popular education is much more inclusive. This inclusivity fosters the
dismantling of social hierarchies and reduces marginalization within the classroom. A precedent
is then set that can be carried out into larger populations that may dismantle more oppressive,
national level hierarchies. Spain, Cuba, and Nicaragua help point us towards the emergent and
underutilized practice of popular education through demonstrating outcomes such as these through
their own personal pedagogical approaches during the literacy movements.

Of important note is the need for longevity. Cuba is the prime example of this for our
purposes. Since the Campaign, Cuba has continued to foster the use of popular education in the
classroom, continues to create a critically-conscious population, and continues to stress the
importance of education. Literacy is an ongoing effort, and while popular education practices can
be more efficient and speed up the literacy acquisition process during short term campaigns,
continuity is essential. As we have seen with Nicaragua, it is possible to regress back to illiteracy.
Therefore, popular education is not a onetime injection that cures all literacy ailments. Instead,
popular education is a long term treatment and healthy habit that introduces and then maintains
literacy.

**Revolution**

Metaphor became such a legitimizing and unifying force, I assert, because of the
circumstances under which each country initiated its literacy movement. The historical context has
become vital for the success of each campaign. In all three cases, we witness a dramatic shift in
government structure and leadership just prior to the campaign’s start. Consider the following:
Spain implemented the Pedagogical Missions in 1931 with the help of Manuel Bartolome Cossío
as one of the primary undertakings of the Second Republic’s administration. The Second Republic
emerged as a democratic response to a crumbling monarchy that lost its imperial clout in 1898.
The new republican Spanish government was a dramatic shift from the pre-existing government, and though not officially termed a “revolution” per say, it was definitionally a revolution in that it was a “replacement of an established government or political system” and “a radical and pervasive change in society and the social structure”. Unlike the implicit “Spanish Revolution”, the Cubans and Nicaraguans underwent explicit Revolutions. Guevara and Castro fought a history entrenched in Spanish imperialism and United States paternalism. In overthrowing the corrupt puppet government of Fulgencio Batista, the pair introduced a radically different political structure. All reform that ensued was dependent on the same revolutionary ideals that motivated them to implement a 1961 National Literacy Campaign. The Nicaraguan Sandinista party found themselves in a very similar position 20 years later, after overthrowing the Somoza dynasty. Throughout the course of revolutionary upheaval of the dictatorship and introduction of an FSLN government, the Nicaraguans decided that literacy was of the utmost importance to the impending reform and initiated the 1980 National Literacy Crusade. In conclusion, “revolution” often becomes a demonstrable precursor to national literacy initiatives.

Defining revolution has been nearly as contentious as defining literacy. One of the more recent and fully developed notions of revolution and in particular social revolution posits that, “social revolutions are set apart from other sorts of conflicts and transformative processes above all by the combination of two coincidences: the coincidence of societal structural change with class upheaval; and the coincidence of political with social transformation” (Meeks 20). The concept of social revolution is the key to understanding literacy movements as a common result of national revolutionary movements. Revolutions “unlike evolutions, lead to the creation of new institutions and cultural reconstruction” (Mtonga 385). In all three cases we witness the societal structural

42 Definition taken from Merriam-Webster
change that attempts to equalize the stark differences between the rural and urban populations and the unified political and social change that incorporates identity and culture formation alongside new government implementation. Because literacy movements are a form of counter-hegemonic resistance, they present one of the greatest forms of social transformation, especially when emancipatory in nature. Widespread education, particularly in the form of non-formal literacy campaigns, is considered a challenge to the status quo of the pre-revolutionary government, viewed as a means to distribute ideology in a legitimizing form, and associated with inclusive political practice (Torres 112). Thus, “the ability to read and write would be deemed essential by the new governing group for the vast majority of the population to be able to partake of the revolutionary or post-independence experience” (Mayo 373). Understanding social revolution, therefore, has allowed us to understand the connection between political revolutions (which require social revolutions) and literacy movements.

It is important to recognize that each revolution will yield an organic or individualized form of widespread educational response. Social, historical, and cultural contexts specific to each country point to different iterations of educational reform and literacy movements. For instance, in the case of Nicaragua, “plans for education as a whole, reflected the government’s conviction that no two revolutions can be alike. Each must obey the peculiar conditions of the country where it occurs” (Black 11). In this way, we explain the obvious differences between Spain, Cuba, and Nicaragua’s literacy movement, but why each, irrespective of these different contexts, chose education of the masses as a valid requisite for the revolution.

Within the revolutionary context, the newly instated governments in these countries had several tasks at hand: establish a new political framework, legitimate their own leadership, and decide which reform efforts would be mounted, and exemplify the political and social culture they
would like to model throughout their control. The “clean slate”, so to speak, inherited as a result of revolutionary turnover, invites the possibility for social revolution and in many cases an associated literacy movement, if it serves a need within the confines of social revolution. The Pedagogical Missions, the Cuban National Literacy Campaign, and the Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade all evolved as a response to the unsatisfactory functional literacy rates in each country, which contributed to social deficits. Because education can promote a revolutionary agenda and social change, it is logical that literacy campaigns were incorporated as a part of revolutionary reform. I believe that large scale revolution, or in more general terms, “social/political movements” are therefore necessary to inspire the support necessary to conduct a literacy initiative. Politics, more often than not and more than we would like to admit, plays a large role in literacy campaigns. A highlighted critique within all three case studies is the influence of a political agenda, either through propaganda, primer lessons, or visible promotion (i.e. the Missionaries reading aloud the new Constitution and explaining the newfound rights of the Spanish people). Very few revolutions or social movements are apolitical. Equally so, very few literacy movements are apolitical. This commonality may explain the intrinsic interweaving of the two throughout history. Additionally, as explained in the coming section, political will helps ensure the success of a literacy campaign, or at the very least has in the three case studies. Therefore, revolution in conjunction with political will helps to promote literacy for the masses.

**Political Will**

Once the revolution, or general “movement”, occurs and the revolutionary government, with its newly inherited “clean slate”, has identified the need for a social revolution involving education and literacy, the government must then decide to act. Therefore, the government must exercise a certain degree of *political will* in order to implement a social revolution, as these
revolutions will not happen without a spark, without prompting. According to Darren Treadway, “political will represents an actor's willingness to expend energy in pursuit of political goals, and it is viewed as an essential precursor to engaging in political behavior” (Treadway 231). Power is not adequate enough to wield political behavior, instead governments and political actors must engage in behaviors that are likely valued by organizations and citizens that might participate, given the proper expenditure of various resources (Treadway 231; Mintzberg 135). In spending these resources for literacy or education and developing political will on the part of all actors, the government will not only develop the necessary support and reap the benefits of any social program, but to some degree it will accrue “soft power”. Many theorists have described soft power as rooted in “an actor’s ideological and cultural appeal”, soft power manages to “to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion” (Mattern 587; Foucault 169). By exercising enough political will, therefore, literacy movements will not only benefit the population under the revolutionary government, but will empower the government in such a way that the population values it on the basis of their cultural and ideological beliefs.

In the three case studies, there is clear evidence of exercised political will. The Spanish Second Republic abandoned political prejudice and invited Cossío to collaborate on the Pedagogical Missions, despite his krasuist and socialist ideals. This partnership allowed the government to express its political will towards the Missions and engage in the political behavior necessary to continue them because Cossío could advise best practices, lead the board of directors, and collaborate with government officials on the decrees and laws in the realm of education. In Nicaragua, political will was clearly demonstrated to the population through the time and resource expenditures invested in the census, exploratory trips to other countries with similar movements, and the invitational visit of Paulo Freire. Cuba, however, made the most sweeping example of
political will. Castro’s audacious announcement in front of the United Nations about his plans for a fully literate nation in a year’s time captured global attention. That promise alone demonstrated enough political will to sustain the movement, however Castro decided to fully commit all political will. Upon his return to Cuba, Castro ordered the closure of all schools in order to send out the most brigadistas possible, paid for enough primers and lesson books for each Cuban citizen, and invested in the training, supplies, and care of brigadistas and learners alike. These actions gained Castro and the National Literacy Campaign the resounding support and exemplified what it means to exercise political will for the purpose of social revolution. Therefore, I conclude that political will and the demonstration of it is a necessary second step towards a literacy-based social movement, once the requisite revolution, social change, or large scale movement has taken place. With all of this in place, my case studies have demonstrated that the next step would be to design and finally implement the campaign.

**Cultural Capital: Finding a Cornerstone Artform**

Throughout the course of implementing each literacy campaign, each of the presented case studies developed a personalized pedagogy, hinging primarily on popular education as I have discussed, and incorporated the use of a primer or curriculum. While both of these are essential, they are intuitive. Of course any campaign with the goal of teaching will require the use of a pedagogy and some developed plan for the use of structured or unstructured lessons. What I view as an essential lesson from the three case studies is the intrinsic literacy value each country ascribed to a different artform. While not all have been highlighted in the discussion of each case study, additional and tangential evidence and readings have implicated different art forms as highly valuable, and at times side projects, to each literacy effort. These art forms have not only fostered the further development of literacy but they have become a primary form of cultural capital.
(Bourdieu 16) for each respective country. The social space created within each artform became a common ground for all literacy participants and granted a degree of equal power to all involved, whether in the form of creation or discussion. Spain, with its multidimensional, multifaceted approach, championed the use of literature above all. Cuba advocated and supported the use of film. And Nicaragua promoted the use of poetry.

The *bibliotecas circulantes*, or circulating libraries, of the Pedagogical Missions was the crux of the travelling assortment. While some Missions could not bring all of the necessary supplies for a theater or cinema or museum, every missionary attempted to bring at least some semblance of the library with them as they traversed the Spanish countryside. Literature became essential to the literacy efforts and became “one of the “unofficial channels” through which Spanish intellectuals disseminated culture and promoted literacy between 1900 and 1936” (Sprague 207). Through the value ascribed to the “canonicity” of various texts, authors, and stories, the Spaniards developed a collective culture and publishers “mediated, directed, or promoted cultural exchange” (Sinclair 38). In this way, books became essential to the goals and outcomes, especially in cultural collectivity, of the Spanish Missions of 1931.

Alongside the implementation of the National Literacy Campaign, Fidel Castro commissioned the *Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos* (ICAIC, Cuban Institute of Art and Cinematographic Industry. The ICAIC is subsidized fully by the Cuban government in an effort to support the creation of revolutionary cinema and all theaters and communities are granted access to every Cuban film produced (Alexander 45). Cinema “was deemed to implementing [revolutionary] ideology” and became “a key arbiter in developing the Cuban revolutionary identity” (Stock 7). The overwhelming support given to the Cuban film industry has created a culture dependent on the use of film for teaching, interacting, and understanding. Some
films are didactic while others become instruments of opinion formation, as Cubans have grown accustomed to appropriating film in order to discuss and debate everyday issues (Fernandes 304). Filmmakers were therefore brought into the revolutionary process, and cultural literacy was augmented by the distribution of Cuban films (Amaya 7). Because of the continued efforts of the ICAIC with the support of Castro and the Cuban Revolutionary Government, film became essential as a complementary literacy tool both during and after the Campaign in 1961.

Finally, poetry became the foundational art form in developing Nicaraguan literacy through the use of “Talleres de Poesía” (Poetry Workshops) as a supplemental program to the Crusade. Nicaragua, the “Land of the Poets” and country of Ruben Dario, was fortunate to have the Cardenal brothers at the forefront of their literacy efforts. While Fernando Cardenal served as the Minister of Education and promoted the Literacy Crusade, Ernesto Cardenal developed the Poetry Workshops and reinvigorated the poetic landscape in Nicaragua, introducing a Marxist approach to developing class consciousness through cultural aesthetics (Dawes viii). During these workshops, participants are invited to learn about poetry, as coordinators read and discuss poems line-by-line to participants. Then, the creative space is opened to the participants so that they can apply the poetic “characteristics” and “rules” they learned as a group in order to produce their own work, which “tends to be anchored in the details of daily life, of unassuming simplicity and directness, and, because it uses the “seen and palpable” world as a central reference, often has an openly political character (Cardenal & Johnson 6). Through poetry, participants could not only appreciate poetry, but they could create poetry and in turn represent, understand, and construct their cultural identity in a group setting while enhancing literacy skills. As a complementary

43 Ruben Dario is a Nicaraguan poet that is considered to be “the father of the Modernist Movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries” (Johnson 2).
program, it is only fitting that the Land of Poets promote literacy and revolutionary identity through the application of poetry. Thus, poetry becomes the cornerstone artform for the Crusade of 1980.

All three literacy movement examples directly or tangentially incorporate a primary artform in order to further promote national literacy. In these examples of literature, film, and poetry we see that participants in each campaign not only personally benefit, but cultural identity can be reified. In this way, I believe all three strengthen cultural literacy within the population. And while some might scoff at the power of art in this way, other historical examples have demonstrated that “the work of art in the world” is tremendously powerful in creating dynamic social and cultural change (Somers 10). I conclude that this component is a highly overlooked yet critical piece of a literacy campaign. In considering my future directions, a cornerstone artform will be essential. Through art, we provide participants with tangible assistance and guidance. This in turn helps promote, enhance, and further any literacy efforts.

Conclusions

If the “literacy crisis” is ever to be solved, we must first understand why literacy campaigns have worked in the past. But first, why is it a crisis? Bronwyn Williams asserts that the “literacy crisis” has been an ongoing battle over the past century. The reason the crisis persists is attributable to varying definitions of literacy, and how successfully achieving one definition does not indicate any potential for achieving another (Williams 178). Therefore, in combatting illiteracy, we must first understand how “literacy” is being conceived, defined, and reported. Then, we must recognize how our pedagogical practices align with this definition. Are we teaching in a way that ensures the attainment of our desired form of literacy? As demonstrated by the case studies, this pedagogy is highly Freirean if the aim is to develop a critically conscious population capable of attaining cultural or emancipatory literacy. Then, it is necessary to understand historical requisites. Has a
revolution or large movement occurred in the country seeking to promote a literacy campaign? If not, how will they exercise the necessary political will? Both dynamic change and political will are necessary to accrue support and promote a literacy initiative. And finally, beyond a means to implement the campaign, has there been a cornerstone artform defined? The three presented examples thrived under the inclusion of a particular form of art, whether directly or tangentially, as this artform became a mode of integrated and hands on teaching for literacy workers. While these are by no means the only questions that need addressing when deciding how and when to implement a literacy campaign, they are the crucial first steps and the most prominent common successes among the presented case studies. An awareness of these thoughts, requisites, and processes would prove extremely beneficial in the promotion of future literacy-based initiatives that hope to combat the ongoing crisis. Time and time again, we see that retrospection regarding what has previously been done to solve a problem can help solve the same problem in the future, given sufficient reflection and individual modification. This presentation of case studies has been an attempt at this retrospection so that future efforts may be more informed.
Chapter 5: GOING FORWARD

“People and Stories”, Health Literacy, Future Directions: What Is to Be Done?

The competence that we have to produce sentences that are likely to be understood might be quite inadequate to produce sentences that are likely to be listened to... Speakers lacking the legitimate competence are de facto excluded from the social domains in which this competence is required. - Pierre Bourdieu, 1991

Insofar as language is impossible without the world to which they refer, the human word is more than mere vocabulary - it is word-and-action. The cognitive dimensions of the literacy process must include the relationships of men with their world. - Paulo Freire, 1972

So Why Should We Care?

Now you may ask: Why take the time to detail these histories, describe these movements, analyze these common threads? What purpose does it all serve? Through a shared understanding of literacy campaigns such as those in Spain, Cuba, and Nicaragua, the definition of “literacy”, and what makes large scale literacy movements effective, we just might be able to enact some social change here in the United States and in our very own communities. Many United States citizens ascribe to the misconception that the United States is one of the most educated or literate countries in the world. According to thorough, albeit at times limited, data collections on the part of various literacy organizations, the United States has presented literacy rates “significantly below average” (internationally) (UN Development Program 71). In fact, over the past twenty years, the United States has seen absolutely no change in literacy rates and has subsequently fallen behind countries that choose to improve their national literacy attainment (National Assessment of Adult Literacy). Reading, writing, and language competencies, according to Bourdieu and Freire as cited
above, yield a certain degree of power, respect, and liberation. If we are to confer this power, respect, and liberation to the American people, we must be concerned with the lack of attention and lack of resources given to adult literacy. I assert that we must care about the examples set by literacy case studies such as those presented from Spain, Cuba, and Nicaragua because they in turn can help us create an informed and effective United States literacy campaign or movement -- as we are certainly facing our own literacy crisis now here at home.

This crisis we face is a multifaceted one. The described stagnation means that for the past 20+ years, the United States has maintained a 14% illiteracy rate. This translates into a total of 32,000,000 United States citizens that today fall below the attainment of a “basic reading level”, according to the U.S. Department of Education (2016). Of these citizens, 41% are Hispanic and 24% are Black (U.S. Dept. of Ed. 2016). Equally as jarring: 19% of all high school graduates are considered functionally illiterate (U.S. Dept. of Ed. 2016). While no numbers are currently reported regarding the illiteracy rate of students that drop out of the education system, the United States reports more generally a 8% dropout rate nationally, a 10% dropout rate among Hispanics, and 9% dropout rate among Blacks (U.S. Dept. of Ed. 2016). While we can only assume that functional illiteracy rates are higher among this population, we cannot fully comprehend the dropout crisis in its entirety as dropout rates are taken between the ages of 16 and 24. Those who leave the system in middle school are entirely forgotten. Statistics and data such as these provide a clear perspective into the decaying situation nationally: little attention paid towards an immutable literacy rate, unfavorable conditions for those who do not speak English or are socially deemed inferior, and poor conditions even within a formal system that appears to be failing its students.

44 According to the 2013 OCED International Skills Outlook Report, this population is primarily foreign language speaking (i.e. Spanish), putting them at a significantly greater disadvantage in the system and contributing to lower literacy rates.
In 1991, the United States Congress made one of its first (and last) explicit attempts at improving the national literacy situation. The National Literacy Act of 1991 (Public Law 102-73) “established the National Institute for Literacy, the National Institute Board, and the Interagency Task Force on Literacy. Amended various federal laws to establish and extend various literacy programs” (Snyder & Dillow 771). While several actions have been taken on the part of the federal government to improve the quality of formal education and formal assessment, nothing has been done since 1991 that has had direct implications for literacy and literacy rates. This highlights a lack of political will and political action directed towards any form of literacy effort and can potentially explain the deteriorating condition of literacy on a national level.

As exemplified by the three case studies, political will is an essential requisite for implementing a successful literacy campaign. Without political will, the United States could never hope to launch a national campaign to improve the situation. Which begs the question: should the situation be improved? If the government does not seem to care, why improve it? I assert that in the spirit of emancipatory literacy, we must not be satisfied with the current situation, we must seek to improve it. This is especially true if we hope to prevent further decline, for the more we separate subsets of the population, the further we marginalize and oppress those who are stuck in a state of illiteracy (Freire 74). Language, discourse, and literacy are vital to attaining social power and self-efficacy, and we must strive to promote these competencies universally if we hope to champion those who have been pushed towards the margins in the past several decades (Hispanics and Blacks especially, given the presented data) (Janks 60). Without the necessary national political will, however, we must look towards other means of conducting literacy initiatives across the nation.
Whether or not there exists the political will to promote a national literacy or national health literacy campaign, the United States is in desperate need of some form of critical literacy education. In chronicling the illiteracy of the nation, I began to wonder what other evidence exists to prove the need for such an initiative. Henry Giroux, not only a political pedagogist but a critic of neoliberalism and educational historian, details in one of his most recent books, *America's Education Deficit and the War on Youth*, the following epidemic in United States education:

The time-honored concepts of literacy and critical thinking are under assault by those on the right who view education at best as a profit-making and training organization and at worst as a disciplinary apparatus and object of repression. For instance, in 2006 members of the Florida state legislature outlawed historical interpretation in public schools, arguing that American history must be taught as a series of facts, rather than as a matter of interpretation, reasoned debate, and accumulation of evidence. Of course, what is really being taught is that critical thinking has no place in the classroom. It gets worse. In 2012, the Texas Republican Party included in their platform a ban on what they termed “higher-order thinking skills” and “critical thinking skills.” In addition, a number of states have introduced legislation that calls for the teaching of climate change denial in the public schools under the guise of “balanced” teaching (Giroux 33).

Giroux is not the only one disheartened by the “closing of the American mind” through a lacking critical-thinking-based educational system (Koch 2, Bloom 19). Dismantling the ability to think critically brings us one step closer to regressing towards functional illiteracy or even worse, ascribing to the “literacy myth”. Now, more than ever, we are in need of an effort that hopes to maintain functional literacy (if not improve our static rates) in addition to fostering critical literacy. This evidence suggests that we are not only facing a lack of political will on the part of the
government towards a literacy campaign, but the active political will to promote a “critical illiteracy”. The national government maintains a set of ideals and goals for the public school system that is the direct opposite of those inherent in a critical literacy campaign. Continuing this line of thinking nationally could pose a real threat to those currently marginalized by the system and only indicates that more will fall into the category of “oppressed” in the future.

This lack of national political will, while foreboding for any large scale literacy effort, means that alternative methods must be sought if we hope to decrease illiteracy rates. The formal education system on a local level would have ideally been the next target of a campaign, given national and government disinterest. This inclination is validated in the sense that targeting and altering formal curricula could prove to be an essential step in promoting “school” (functional, formal) literacy and cultural or social literacy (Short & Kauffman 60). However, the condition of our formal system makes this an impossible option here in the United States as “all institutionalized learning occurs under conditions shaped by contingencies beyond the control of any of the individual actors (Miller 5). Thus, any motion to implement critical pedagogy or popular education in order to promote the acquisition of emancipatory literacy would quickly face opposition, given strict regulations and high expectations under standardized testing constraints, making any individual change non-impactful. With the school system ruled out as a possible alternate, I believe that for any real change to be implemented with regards to the United States’ literacy, it must come from grassroots, informal, and community-based efforts. In essence, pockets of people could promote movements that together would amass enough impact so as to be comparable to that of a national effort, when a national effort is not an option.

The lessons acquired from the three case studies can then also be applied to these small-scale efforts. In order to demonstrate this, I will propose a potential “future direction” for one such
grassroots/informal/community based literacy campaign, given what I have learned and presented regarding the three chosen case studies and the current literacy situation in the United States. Of particular personal interest is the current state of “health literacy” nationally, given our growing diversity and unchanging literacy rate. Health literacy, as I will detail in the coming section, is a subcategory of critical literacy. An emerging field, health literacy requires that a given learner be functionally literate, critically aware of their social/historical/cultural context, and also possess a competency in the signs, discourse, and language of health and medicine. Because of this, health literacy goes hand-in-hand with critical literacy, and even emancipatory literacy, as this competency liberates many patients from blindly following (or not) authority figures and care providers. Therefore, in my proposal of this grassroots campaign, my definition of “literacy” (i.e. the competency I hope to develop among participants) is that of health literacy. After defining and describing the current state of health literacy, I will apply the conclusions drawn from the three case studies to a new campaign.

**Health Literacy**

Today, those interested in improving health and health care are all too commonly focused on the science behind the medicine, the delivery of care, the preparation of the physician. While all of this is essential to great provision of care, we must also concern ourselves with the patient, the patient’s receipt of care, and the patient’s ability to seek out or follow through with care. In attempting to understand this, Albert Bandura proposed a social cognitive approach to understanding health promotion and disease prevention among those receiving care, which later became known as the Health Beliefs Model. According to Bandura, the theory’s core determinants include:
knowledge of health risks and benefits of different health practices, perceived self-efficacy that one can exercise control over one’s health habits, outcome expectations about the expected costs and benefits for different health habits, the health goals people set for themselves and the concrete plans and strategies for realizing them, and the perceived facilitators and social and structural impediments to the changes they seek (Bandura 144).

Personal knowledge and the subsequent health beliefs and self-efficacy beliefs on the part of the patient are the principal requisites, therefore, for health promotion and disease prevention. Without these requisites, care providers experience the greatest hurdle in providing sustainable and effective care to patients (Bandura 146). Within this concept of “personal knowledge” and “self-efficacy” we see the emerging need for a health literacy, its promotion, and its improvement. In fact, health literacy has been observed to have a direct impact on a patient’s levels of perceived self-efficacy (Sarkar 823). The relationship between health and literacy is rarely discussed in public discourse and many times forgotten when discussing social determinants of health (Hayes 1845). This lack of attention has left the notion of “health literacy” largely hidden and poorly understood. It was only in 1998 that the World Health Organization decided to investigate the relationship between health, literacy, and patient self-efficacy, bringing with it some much needed public attention. Since then, various studies have been done to characterize and quantify this idea of health literacy.

Just as debate has surrounded the defining of “literacy”, so too has it surrounded “health literacy. In a metaanalysis of all health literacy material, Kristine Sorensen found a total of 17 unique definitions of health literacy (Sorensen 4). Of the definitions, the most comprehensive is the one proposed by the Institute of Medicine in 2004, defining health literacy as, “the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information
and services needed to make appropriate health decisions... based on the interaction of the individual’s skills with health contexts and broad social and cultural factors at home, work, and in the community” (Institute of Medicine 8). The only definition that builds further on this was proposed by Freedman, adding a group dimension, as health literacy is conceived of as the “degree to which individuals and groups can obtain, process, understand, evaluate, and act upon information needed to make public health decisions that benefit the community” (Freedman 447). Because “outcomes are related to the health of the individual, but vary in nuance, e.g., making health decisions, functioning in the healthcare environment, or promoting and maintaining good health”, health literacy is an individual construct; however, because the education and promotion of such outcomes will happen primarily through public health initiatives and on a societal level it has also become a group construct, much like Freedman’s definition (Berkman 10). Emphasis placed on the ability to purposefully and effectively use competencies in reading, understanding, and knowing health materials places value and importance on capacity skills in attaining health literacy, with the capacity to express oneself verbally and negotiate rising to the top of those necessary (Sorensen 7). Thus, health literacy is essential to promoting the Health Beliefs Model, which in turn is essential to improving disease prevention, health education, and health promotion.

Since becoming more fully understood and more-or-less defined, health literacy has been approached in one of two ways: health literacy as a risk-factor and health literacy as an asset (Nutbeam 2074). From the perspective of the care provider, health literacy presents as a risk factor as prior knowledge and reading skills are essential in “decision making, compliance with prescribed medication us, and capacity to self-manage disease” (Nutbeam 2073). The inability for a physician to recognize a potential patient’s low health literacy rates then becomes detrimental to the quality of care provided. Conversely, from the perspective of the patient, health literacy
becomes an asset as it provides a “means to enabling individuals to exert greater control over their health and the range of personal, social, and environmental determinants of health” (Nutbeam 2074). Through the acquisition of this literacy competency, the population can critically engage with health and other social determinants that may be impacting health and thus their health literacy has become an asset. From the “health literacy as asset” approach, we see the developing connection between health literacy and critical literacy.

Just as critical literacy requires learners to situate themselves and what they read in a social, cultural, and historical context, so does health literacy. While literacy, primarily functional literacy, is a social determinant of health in and of itself, health literacy allows learners to contextualize how their health may be impacted or improved via other social determinants (Nutbeam 260). The Health Determinants Model proposes a deep and influential connections between health status and a patient’s social capital and economic and environmental circumstances (Macinko & Starfield 387). Freire’s concept of “reading the word and reading the world” is therefore inherently necessary in the promotion of health literacy: patients must not only read the prescription, promotional material, or pamphlet on health in front of them (the “word”) but they must also navigate and read how this connects to their current health status, socioeconomic status, cultural practices, or patient history (the “world”). In recognizing this connection, we can hopefully remove the care provider’s current stigma towards asking about or attempting to gauge a patient’s reading or literacy skills, and promote the importance of health literacy in understanding how the patient will function in the health system (Chew 588; Andrus & Roth 283). Once we remove this stigma, it will be possible to interrogate current levels of health literacy, pilot methods to measure health literacy, and develop public health initiatives that target health literacy.
Of late, health literacy has been studied within small sample populations. From this preliminary research, however, several key conclusions have been made. First, health care materials are typically written at a 10th grade level or higher, however a majority of the United States adult population reads at an 8th-9th grade level (Safeer & Keenan 463). Medical jargon and terminology aside, this poses tremendous issues. Approximately 50% of Americans are unable to comprehend this material (Safeer & Keenan 463). The health care and health promotion sector have created a structural impediment through the use of this reading level and professional medical vocabulary that excludes large pockets of the population. Thus, early studies have identified the inability to provide for various levels of literacy and health literacy on the part of care providers as a form of structural violence against a majority of the socially disadvantaged and health illiterate population (Galtung 81). Many findings “indicate that adults with limited health literacy proficiencies are generally those who have not completed high school or obtained a GED, have health related restrictions on their ability to attend school or work, are members of minority or marginalized population groups, and/or who have immigrated to the United States” (Rudd S13). Statistics show that 35% of all English-speaking patients and, of particular interest to my work, 62% of Spanish-speaking patients in sample studies within U.S. hospitals were categorized as having “poor health literacy”, on rudimentary scales (Safeer & Keenan 463). A majority of our population therefore is at a disadvantage within our healthcare system. This population possesses few competencies that allow them then navigate their own health and the healthcare system, while at the same time hindering their levels of perceived self-efficacy.

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45 Structural violence: “refers to a form of violence wherein some social structure or social institution may harm people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs” (Galtung).
In order to further understand these disparities and define the health literacy problem, several attempts have been made to measure and promote health literacy. The most fully developed measurement tool has become the Test of Functional Health Literacy in Adults (TOFHLA), which “consists of a 50-item reading comprehension and 17-item numerical ability test” and takes anywhere from 25 to 60 minutes to administer in Spanish or English (Parker 537). Other, simpler tests have been developed in the hopes of decreasing the time necessary to complete the test. The Rapid Estimate of Adult Literacy in Medicine (REALM) asks patients to identify as many words as they can on a sheet of 66 health terms, with an assigned score yielding an approximation of their literacy and medical comprehension skills (Institute of Medicine 25). This test has tested comparable to TOFHLA a majority of the time. Another study has demonstrated that three basic questions are necessary for a physician or care provider to roughly estimate their patients’ health literacy level: How often do you have someone help you read hospital materials?; How confident are you filling out medical forms by yourself?; and How often do you have problems learning about your medical condition because of difficulty understanding written information? (Chew 588). The recent focus on quantifying health literacy has thus stemmed from the desire to define the current state of the problem but also to help a care provider understand in real time the competency levels of the patient sitting in front of them.

As those focused on devising a screening process continue to work, many have begun investigating methods to improve health literacy. On the whole, very few campaigns or projects have actually been implemented, but valuable descriptions, theories, and ideas have been put forward in order to situate health literacy in the field of public health promotion. In the past, health promotion has taken a “top-down” approach, viewing the policy makers and care providers as the ultimate health supporters that work on “behalf” of the people, doing health promotion “to” or
“for” people (Nutbeam 265). This has been the first break with tradition made by health literacy promoters. If health literacy is to be incorporated into the field of public health, we must begin to view health promotion as done “by” and “with” the target community (Nutbeam 265). To situate themselves within this target community, Ilona Kickbusch advises that we ask questions such as: “How is health knowledge sought out and shared within a community? How easy is it to access the health resources of a community and of the society at large? What defines the dominant health culture of a community?” (Kickbusch 294). Acquiring this information accomplishes several things. First, it develops a rapport between the health promoter and the community. Then, it helps the promoter understand the community and its individual needs. It then considers the resources (potentially among other social determinants) and the culture of the community in relation to health. In doing so, the health promoter can then tailor the subsequent public health program to the community’s needs and include context specific information, language, or ideas so as to promote critical health literacy. This critical health literacy accounts for science, civic, social, and cultural knowledge or competency (Zarcadoolas 201). By the end of this programming, the promoter aims to improve both individual and community capacity “to act on social, economic, and cultural determinants of health” (Nutbeam 265).

For the purpose of achieving higher levels of medical compliance, medical self-efficacy, disease prevention, health service use, medical participation, and medical knowledge on the part of patients, we must begin to focus on further developing these ideas of health literacy as a public health effort. The field of public health has grown tremendously in the past several decades as it attempts to provide more cohesive and sustainable programming. As a part of this development, it is now necessary that we take into consideration any given campaign’s health literacy goals in addition to participants’ entrance levels of health literacy. The few who have attempted health
literacy outreach already have taken a more scientific approach grounded in traditional methods of public health. Despite the important connection between health literacy and public health, as I have stressed it, I believe that a humanities/cultural studies approach will also be necessary. Given health literacy’s classification as a more specific form of critical literacy, its connections to social and cultural contexts, and consciousness building nature, I believe that a health literacy campaign might be no different than a general literacy movement, campaign, or crusade. The examples set and lessons learned from the three presented case studies could easily transfer to a more pointed and specialized health literacy campaign.

**Proposed Health Literacy Campaign**

As evidenced by the three case studies, revolution and political will are necessary requisites for a successful national literacy campaign. In detailing the current status of literacy and health literacy in the United States, it is evident that there exists little political will to improve national literacy rates or to even promote critical consciousness. Without one requisite, it begs the question: are we in a period of revolution? If nothing else, the three case studies highlight that “revolutionary times require revolutionary thinking and action” and revolutionary education requires this revolutionary thought (Abendroth 146). In the text *Rebel Literacy*, Mark Abendroth asserts that the world is currently ready for revolution as “neoliberalism has brought the world to a pre-revolutionary condition that rewards some immensely while leaving the majority of humanity struggling to cope with uncertainty, including nearly a billion people struggling to survive” (Abendroth 147). The global economy has faced a dramatic decline in the influence of neoliberalism in the early years of the 21st century. In its place a shift towards social investment is developing: “goals of the social investment perspective are to increase social inclusion and minimize the intergenerational transfer of poverty as well as to ensure that the population is well
prepared for the likely employment conditions (demand for higher educational qualifications; less job security; more precarious forms of employment) of contemporary economies” (Jenson 27). Whether or not the United States government, as well-established as it is, could undergo a “revolution” on the scale of Cuba’s or Nicaragua’s is another question. However, many do point to signs that we exist in a pre-revolutionary state, socially and economically (if not politically). Nationally, we see highly targeted and, at time, Marxist approaches to social revolution on the basis of gender, racial, and class-based equality present themselves readily and frequently in the media (Dunbar 486). From these demonstrations and movements, it can be said that a continued effort to develop social critical consciousness has been established. This sort of critical consciousness that appears to be emerging within more and more pockets of small groups nationally, indicates the potential for revolution. Using this momentum, it might be possible to propose the grassroots literacy campaign I have mentioned, regardless of national political will. Instead political will may have to be enacted on a smaller scale, i.e. in the case of health literacy, the political will of the American Medical Association or hospital systems or health advocacy workers will need to be enacted. Possessing the social inclination towards revolution and a potential source of some degree of political will, I proceed with proposing the following health literacy campaign.

With an environment potentially ripe for a literacy campaign, but lacking the national and unified perspective enjoyed by Spain, Cuba, and Nicaragua by their national governments, I believe that we need to use the following conceptual metaphor for a proposed United States campaign: *Literacy as health*. In focusing more narrowly on the critical consciousness developed through health literacy, it is more feasible to gather support on the part of organizations or grassroots groups that could provide the necessary political will. Additionally, the targeted nature
of this metaphor constructs a goal with which few could argue. For instance, if current legislation is so opposed to critical thinking in the formal school system, an informal campaign that challenges the current traditions generally speaking (i.e. a general “literacy campaign”) would be viewed as a direct threat, I believe, and would require more energy, effort, and support to conduct. I believe building up to a general literacy campaign in the United States, therefore, is the way to go. Health, a universal condition and issue, and a health literacy campaign would be much less contested nationally and may actually gain valuable support from the national government. The United States school system is so highly developed, traditionalized, and structured today, that an informal literacy campaign has to surmount the challenge of competing with lessons disseminated through school lessons. This would prove the second largest challenge in choosing general literacy over health literacy. Instead, health literacy remains an emerging concept and field of study, therefore any form of informal education in the name of health literacy is a new endeavor that could gain more traction publicly. The benefit of promoting health literacy is that it inherently includes developing critical literacy, as discussed earlier. In this way, perhaps it would be possible to encourage a later trend towards critical pedagogy in general, once the public recognizes the benefits of the critical literacy skills transferred to the population by way of the health literacy campaign. Because health outcomes are directly affected by the degree to which a patient is health literate, the metaphor Literacy as health is both practical and ideologically sound.

Using this metaphor to guide the goals and the design of the proposed campaign, it would next be necessary, according to the case studies, to implement both popular education pedagogy and a form of “cultural capital” found in a cornerstone art form. I assert that to promote a health literacy campaign, the use of short stories as a cornerstone art form, through the application of the program “People & Stories/Gente y Cuentos”, would accomplish both of these goals. As discussed
earlier, health literacy initially presents itself as a public health topic. This categorization instinctively leads many towards active or passive “health programming” in the form of poster campaigns, demonstrations, and lectures. I assert that through the fusion of literature and health literacy motives, it is possible to take a cultural studies approach to health literacy pedagogy. In a collection of essays titled *The Body and the Text*, various researchers propose the integration of literature with medicine. In fact, “medicine would be improved by incorporating the insights of the humanities and [literature is] a particularly effective agent for that transfer” (Woodcock 41). Through literature, readers are able to participate with scenarios, engage with the idea of performance, and ascertain cultural descriptions associated with various images or ideas. Both patients and care providers can gain a certain connection to the world and an insight into shared spaces within cultural and social boundaries with the use of literature (Monroe 25). Within the medical setting the patient and the care provider act as both literary critic and text, each providing their own narrative full of metaphors waiting to be interpreted by the other (Monroe 26). These metaphors are constantly being applied to the understanding of health. Historically speaking, widespread and hard to cure diseases such as tuberculosis and cancer are readily associated with certain fantasies that incorporate metaphoric language; for example, many spoke of TB and cancer as processes of “consumption”, acts of “invasion” on the part of foreign bodies/growths, and in the end sentences to death (Sontag 19). Metaphor and narrative are extremely pervasive throughout medical and health discourse.

The importance of narrative in conveying ourselves, especially in a medical setting, makes literature and medicine analogous. So, while some may be hesitant about incorporating literature rather than the traditional materials associated with public health, many point to the parallels that exist in the literature and through the use of the literature with medicine. In this way, we can
promote health literacy, encouraging community members to engage with medical themes, topics, and situations while also learning to engage and negotiate presented narrative, understand conveyed messages, and connect culturally ascribed descriptors. Literature “can contribute to the health of persons and communities only to the extent that it is appropriated and put to use by its readers and the larger culture” (Monroe 25). “People & Stories/Gente y Cuentos” provides the perfect platform to navigate literature, narrative, cultural conceptual metaphor, medicine, and health literacy skills through a popular education pedagogy.

Applying “People and Stories” for Health Literacy Promotion

In 1972, Sarah Hirschman was invited to speak with a group of young Latina women in a housing project just outside of Cambridge, MA. Hirschman used this opportunity to pilot a form of reading discussion that she had been tinkering with ever since she stumbled upon a seminar held on Harvard’s campus three years earlier. Sitting in a crowded campus auditorium, Hirschman first encountered the ideas of critical consciousness, popular education, and a pedagogy for the oppressed - yes, Hirschman watched on as Paulo Freire gave one of his earlier talks on his developing theory (Allen xvi). Since that moment in 1972 when Hirschman sat on a stoop surrounded by Latina women, she and her successors have worked tirelessly to promote, share, and teach according to the “People and Stories/Gente y Cuentos” model that Hirschman herself developed.

Hirschman explains her grounding questions and primary motivations for establishing the “People and Stories” program in the opening chapter of her book, People and Stories/Gente y Cuentos: Who Owns Literature? Communities Find Their Voice Through Short Stories:

Each of us may be curious about the other in our multicultural, multi-class society but it is difficult to talk to strangers. It is even more difficult for our educators to find ways to
engage and motivate voices and to establish a common ground with people that are so different from each other and where so many have been denied an orderly and complete education. Yet as democratic citizens, we have established laudable goals as expressed in Article twenty seven of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 which states “everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.” But what exactly are we doing to translate these goals on the ground? (Hirschman xvii).

“People and Stories” is Hirschman’s attempt at achieving these “goals on the ground”. Inspired by the idea of literacy as liberation and the positive impact of literature, Hirschman proposed a cultural reading circle that invited 8-15 strangers to read and discuss a short story together. The discussions that are fostered in a “People and Stories” session are reliant on “reader-text transaction”, as each reader will bring to and take from the text in different ways depending on their life history, present preoccupations, and even wishes or dreams (Rosenblatt 98). Together, participants bring their individual experiences and contexts that influence how they will discuss the story. In sharing these aloud with the group, all participants are exposed the various transactions that have occurred from reading the exact same story. In such, Hirschman believed that critical consciousness could be developed through this sharing of varied experiences and perspectives.

These experiences and perspectives would not be solicited from participants, however, without material with which to have these transactions, hence the importance of the short story.

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46 Studies such as those in “Ryan, M. “Read a Book--Or Go To Jail.” Parade Magazine. NY Post, February 5, 1995.” demonstrate the positive outcomes that can be achieved through engaging with literature. This study out of U. of Indiana and Dartmouth found that serious criminal offenders who participated in a 12 week literature seminar were less likely to commit new crimes after their release than those in an established “control group”.

Each lesson47 in the “People and Stories” program begins with the coordinator (someone trained in the “People and Stories” model) reading a short story aloud to the group as participants follow along with their own individual copy of the story. In this way, those with no literacy skills are not singled out by their inability to help read the story aloud, those with limited literacy48 skills are allowed to practice reading while listening, and those who are literate can continue practicing. Why a short story, though? Julio Cortázar, an Argentine short story writer, once said, “Short stories… are living, breathing creatures, complete organisms, closed circles” (Cortázar 3). Hirschman quickly recognized this when she began delving into the world of Spanish literature.49 Fortunately at the time, the world of Spanish short stories was flourishing: writers such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Carlos Fuentes, and Isabel Allende were changing the scene of Spanish literature, no longer conforming to the European writing traditions and embracing the wholly Latin American identity and culture (Hirschman 28). This drew Hirschman to the short story for many reasons: the first being their accessibility and ease of transfer, within 20-30 minutes the whole group can read an entire short story together; the second being that short stories provide poignant snapshots of scenes from our daily lives, in addition to providing examples of well thought out or employed literary techniques; and the third being that with this Latin American “short story boom” Latino participants could not only read stories in their native language but engage with their own or neighboring cultures in a way never before possible (Hirschman 31). While many originally criticized Hirschman for selecting “highbrow literature”, Hirschman asserted from the beginning

47 A “People and Stories” “course” or “program” is a multi-lesson one. There are 8 lessons, or meeting times, during which the group comes together. This longevity allows participants to use the first class to acclimate to the style so that following meetings run more smoothly but also allow the participants to be exposed to multiple stories and multiple transactions.

48 Functionally literate

49 The program initially started out as targeted towards the Spanish speaking population, hence “Gente y Cuentos”. It was not until about 1986, 14 years after starting the program, that the English version, “People and Stories” came into being.
that there is no “owner of literature”, no qualification that gives anyone the right to read a story, no level of education necessary to have a complete transaction with a story. Herein lies the success of Hirschman’s program. The discussions that coordinators lead following the reading of the short story only perpetuate Hirschman’s assertions while continually demonstrating them to the participants.

Because of these assertions on the part of Hirschman, “People and Stories” was able to accomplish several outcomes throughout the course of the program. The level playing field presented to each group of participants in a lesson (through the collective reading of a short story that none have seen before), helps diverse groups of participants overcome various barriers that may exist between them and encourage discussions between those who before may have felt “estranged” (Hirschman 75). Participant groups are more often than not heterogeneous, and deliberately so. Many times participants come from various educational, social, and cultural backgrounds. They represent a wide variety of ages and genders, and all bring their own unique perspective because of this. The dynamic composition of a group (even when controlled for language or sex or age depending on the goal of any given course) allows people to interact with these various perspectives and in turn facilitates developing a critical and respectful awareness of their similarities and differences (Hirschman 80). At the same time, the participants gain a critical awareness and consciousness of themselves and their own identity. Discussions allow them to connect their experiences with those of the short story’s protagonist or the participant sitting next to them. This success in aiding self-awareness has been seen not only in Hirschman’s program but similar offshoots. Hilda Gonzalez Le Denmat set up a similar program in the southwestern United States and found that the women she worked with “began to peer through the blinds that have previously closed off other understandings and possibilities to them … creating a consciousness
of themselves as individuals and as a group... they engage with readings and discussions of literature that is of relevance to them as women, as mothers, as wives, as minorities, and as immigrants, while tapping into their own linguistic, social, and cultural resources” (Andrade 284). These reading discussions help develop critical consciousness by calling into question the transactions solicited from the reading but also through the discussions facilitated in a diverse but equal setting.

In turn, this critical consciousness facilitates the other successes of the “people and Stories” program. First, the participants leave with a heightened sense of self-efficacy, believing that regardless of their educational history they can now access literature they once thought inaccessible (Hirschman 82). This, many times, promotes the future attainment of literacy skills or general education as participants have developed an appreciation for literature and have felt thoroughly empowered after recognizing that they too can read and engage with what was once considered “highbrow literature” (Hirschman 81). In conjunction with the acquired critical consciousness, many participants enjoyed these outcomes that propelled them towards a more literate, liberated, and engaged position. Hirschman in effect developed a successful and engaging popular education-based program. First, the program teaches all potential coordinators about Paulo Freire, critical consciousness, and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, with the hopes of guiding their future coordination style. Then, experience-based questions and responses drive the guided reading discussions; and as mentioned before, experience and critical consciousness are key tenets of popular education.

These discussions are carefully directed and their successes are not simply attributed to a “good day” or “chatty group”. Only after fully analyzing the story alone can a coordinator present

50 Aware of this from personal experience in being trained as a coordinator.
a story to the participants. Hirschman, beyond designing the course’s theory and outlining the short story selection process, decided that each coordinator would be given a set of tools to help both themselves and the participants understand and discuss the story. Coordinators are encouraged to dedicate a significant amount of time preparing stories prior to class. During this preparation, coordinators are advised to analyze the story on their own, searching for the following four categories that Hirschman believed would effectively guide and organize the analysis: poetic landscape, contrasts and confrontations, shadows, and themes (Hirschman 34).

- **Poetic Landscape**: Hirschman advised that coordinators first pay attention to the “texture of fiction”, rarely is a text linear, simple, or orderly (Hirschman 40). The poetic landscape aligns most closely with a traditional formalist approach to literary analysis, which would take into consideration the literary devices, word choice, and stylistic elements that facilitate the story (Sobejano-Morán 4). While investigating the poetic landscape, coordinators look for interesting word choices, irony, metaphor, simile, rhyme, allusions, dialogue, adjective choice, setting, narrative voice, focalization, and any other unique stylistic decisions included by the author (Hirschman 39).

- **Contrasts and Confrontations**: Best described in Hirshman’s direct language, contrasts and confrontations exist because “a literary text brings concepts, words, and images to confront each other in unexpected and vigorous ways. Tensions are generated that emphasize contrasts and similarities. This confrontation of forces generates an energy that acts on the imagination, which then begins to splinter and recast what it encounters. As we try to reconcile contrasts or become aware of the dramatic need to accept sometimes irreconcilable oppositions” (Hirschman 40). Stories present readers with both opposing dichotomies and complementary dyads (Bakhtin 324). Any obstacle, opposition, contrast,
or pairing may present itself as a “contrast or confrontation”. These tensions that arise promote the conflicts that drive the plotline of a short story. Most often, these confrontations and contrasts place characters, settings, and themes in direct contact with their antithesis or definitional other.

- **Shadows**: Shadows represent one of the trickiest parts of analyzing a short story. Many times there are questions that cannot be answered, occurrences that cannot be explained, and characters or plotlines that cannot be rationalized. These ambiguities, that no amount of analysis can resolve, remain the shadows of a story (Hirschman 42). Shadows invite speculation and imagination into any discussion, as they will never truly be resolved. These textual elements provide the opportunity for participants to logic through and rationalize certain aspects of the text without the fear of being wrong. Additionally, shadows help us identify the things we can analyze by drawing our eye to what we cannot definitively analyze (Hirschman 43).

- **Themes**: In searching for themes, the coordinator seeks out the opinions, messages, lessons, and positions presented in the text (Hirschman 44). Themes are sought out by the coordinator not only as a means to understand the story but as a means to challenge the participants, to invite them to present their interpretations and demand explanations from one another. In this way, themes are perhaps the most complex part of the analysis, for they are not only presented but they are questioned as the coordinator hopes to arrive at a shared understanding of the themes’ significance (Hirschman 44).

Once the coordinator has outlined all potential elements in each of these four categories (Hirschman advises the coordinator to have four sheets of paper full of notes, one for each category, 35), it is time to construct discussion questions.
The discussion questions are a series of 20-30 questions per story that will guide the conversation among the participants. These questions must be open ended and cover all four categories, with one additional category: life experience (Hirschman 48). Life experience questions offer an intimate perspective on the story and its connections to personal experiences. By incorporating an experience question after discussing a theme or shadow, for instance, the coordinator invites participants to recognize that by simply living life they have been given the necessary tools to personally connect with and analyze any given short story. Designing questions is one of the most important tasks of the coordinator. Successful questions will inspire a back and forth between participants that ideally requires little intervention on the part of the coordinator, who becomes more of a guide, mediator, and subsequent “question poser” when necessary (Hirschman 50). Questions not only help participants analyze the story but promote the further creation of a critical consciousness, drawing forth individual experiences that may be unique or shared within the group. In this way, participants begin to “understand the other through literature”, the ultimate goal of Hirschman’s program (Hirschman 75).

The poetic landscape, contrasts and confrontations, shadows, themes, and lived experiences can be applied to a variety of short story subject matter. Regardless of the topic presented in a short story, each piece offers the opportunity to promote literacy, self-efficacy, and mutual respect for a culture or a neighbor. The following example will demonstrate the application of Hirschman’s method to a story focused on health, health care, and death. I believe that discussions of stories such as this one would fit within a “People and Stories” program implemented for the purpose of a health literacy campaign. By encouraging participants to engage with and discuss subject matter such as this, coordinators could add additional information by way of medical terminology, tips for navigating the clinic setting, or descriptions of medical processes
that supplement presented themes in the hopes of developing health literacy competencies. This additional information can be interwoven in several parts of the “People and Stories” lesson outline. While I have only detailed the discussion section of a lesson, as it is the most valuable aspect of the lesson in terms of popular education practices and critical consciousness development, the “People and Stories” process provides a recommended “lesson timeline”. A lesson is typically outlined as such:

1. Present the story to the group - provide sufficient background about the author and the time period in which it was written so that readers can contextualize the story. Also, point out on a map where the story comes from. Many times participants have a hard time imagining far off places such as Spain, Uruguay, or Guatemala, even if they themselves come from a neighboring country. This situates the readers geographically.

2. Invite participants to comment on the title, especially if it is ambiguous or divisive.

3. Introduce any necessary terminology, define any confusing words, elaborate on essential allusions. This will provide context so that the reading is less confusing. *This could be a space to provide health literacy skills.

4. Read the story aloud (as the coordinator), while all participants follow along with their own copy.

5. Pose discussion questions to the group. Allow discussion to follow the course it may but attempt to cover the majority of the questions.

6. Many coordinators opt to provide a “creative space” following the discussion in which participants respond to a prompt by writing or drawing. This activity, while developing more literacy competencies, also provides a space for the participants to solidify the ideas they discussed, further connect certain themes from the discussion to the outside world,
and further explore their own ideas about the topic. *This space is also a nice place to incorporate any additional lessons and where I personally put some ESL training and vocabulary when asked of me during pilot sessions.

The next section will provide an example of steps 1, 3, and 5 when applied to “Juan Holgado and Death” by Fernán Caballero.

“Juan Holgado and Death” by Fernán Caballero: An Example

Literary critics, ethnologists, folklorists, and sociologists across the globe have been awestruck at the wide ranging influence of the common tale, “Death and the Doctor”. This tale, regardless of where it is presented, commonly chronicles a man selected by Death him/herself to serve as the new town doctor to facilitate Death’s visits (Charnon-Deutsch 13). In the end, Death’s doctor always receives his own visit from Death, having fallen terribly ill himself despite Death’s promises. This coming of Death calls on the Doctor to question the semantics of Death’s promise and the lesson truly learned from taking up Death’s bidding. In 1850, “Juan Holgado y la muerte” (“Juan Holgado and Death”), written by Fernán Caballero, appeared in Spain’s El Semanario Pintoresco. An archetypal European tale, “Juan Holgado and Death” was one of the earlier Spanish attempts at the cuentos artistico, or artistic story, and was primarily utilized as a means of encouraging “human self-scrutiny and reciprocity” (Charnon-Deutsch 13). Themes and subject matter such as ‘what it means to be a doctor’, ‘what death may present itself as’, and ‘what illness truly is’ all emerge while reading “Juan Holgado and Death”. Because of this, it is a prime candidate for a health-centered “People and Stories” lesson. This story could serve in the “People and Stories” or “Gente y Cuentos” section of the program, originally published in Spanish but also successfully translated into English. The full text of this story is presented in Appendix A. However, the following are key excerpts from which I developed “People and Stories” type
questions. These examples are meant to demonstrate both questions relating to all five categories and how “People and Stories” could in fact serve a health literacy campaign agenda.

**Step 1: Introduction**

Fernán Caballero is the pseudonym (fake name) used by Cecilia Francisca Josefa Böhl de Faber y Larrea, who was born in 1796 and died in 1877. Fernán Caballero was the daughter of a German merchant who married a woman from Cadiz, Spain. Despite being educated back in Germany, Fernán Caballero spent most of her life in Andalucia, the southern part of Spain. Fernán Caballero was widowed after marrying a Spanish infantryman and began writing to earn a living, she however used the pseudonym so as to hide her female identity while also promoting a more Spanish identity. With a natural gift for storytelling, Fernán Caballero is considered one of the great “narrators” of the time. She focused on topics of morality, the human condition, romance, and the unavoidable circumstances of life. In 1830, she published “Juan Holgado and Death”. Fernán Caballero is famous for being a pioneer in the field of realism and people today still read her stories to understand the culture of Spain at the time. (Encyclopedia Britannica 913; Caballero 9). **Be sure to point out Spain and Andalucia on the map**

**Step 3: Context, Definitions, Allusions**

- **Misnomer**: a wrong or inaccurate name or designation

- **“Pleased as Punch”**: (allusion) “As pleased as Punch’ derives from the puppet character Mr. Punch. Punch's name itself derives from Polichinello (spelled various ways, including Punchinello), a puppet used in the 16th century Italian Commedia dell'arte. In performance, the grotesque Punch character is depicted as self-satisfied and delighted with his evil deeds, squawking "That's the way to do it!" whenever he dispatches another victim.” (definition from “Phrase Finder”)
- **Our Lady of Solitude** (Spanish: *María de la Soledad*): “a title of Mary (mother of Jesus) and a special form of Marian devotion practiced in Spanish-speaking countries to commemorate the solitude of Mary on Holy Saturday” (from Catholic Encyclopedia 1912)

- **Methuselah**: (“Man of the dart,” or alternatively “when he dies, it will be sent”) “was the longest-lived person in history, according to the Hebrew Bible.” (from New World Encyclopedia)

- *Depending on medical lessons the coordinator hopes to apply, could add additional definitions here that are not necessarily provided in the text but tangentially related*

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**Step 5: Discussion Questions (abridged)**

“Don’t be alarmed, Juan Holgado, it’s not your time yet. To repay your kindness I’m going to give you a piece of advice: become a doctor, and I assure you that no one in the world will be more famous and earn more money.”

“Madam Death, I’ll be happy if you don’t remember me for a goodly number of years. As for the rest, becoming a doctor isn’t for me.”

“And why not?”

“Because I have no formal education.” (Caballero 32).

Coordinator note: identified as a *theme* for the story, as the topic of what it means to be a doctor and what it means to die are present throughout the text.

- What are the qualities that Juan Holgado associates with a Doctor? Why do you think Death does not care that he has none of these qualities? *(Theme)*

- What are doctors like where you are from, what do people think about doctors, what skills do you think a doctor needs to possess? *(Experience, tied to health literacy)*

“If when you enter a bedroom you see me sitting at the patient’s bedside, say unequivocally that he’s dying, that there’s no cure, and that they should get him ready. If on the contrary, I’m not there, assure him he’s not dying and prescribe him water from an earthen jar.” (Caballero 33).
Coordinator note: there are several unanswered “logistics” within Juan Holgado and Death’s bargain. This passage provides an insight into the way in which the bargain plays out, but not how or why. For instance, why did Death choose an earthen jar of water for the prescription? Why can’t others see Death? This passage provides several examples of shadows.

- Is there anyone else besides Juan Holgado who is able to see Death when she appears? Why was Juan Holgado given this ability? (Shadow)
- Has someone you know had a “near death experience” and “seen death”? How have they described it? Do you agree with their description of death? (Experience, tied to health literacy)
- Has there ever been anyone in your life that has been told by a doctor that there is nothing they can do to treat them? How did that make them/you feel? Should doctors always have an answer? (Experience, tied to health literacy)
- What does Death tell Juan Holgado to prescribe to the patients that aren’t ready to die? Why is it not medicine? Do you believe this will help? How do you think townspeople reacted to such a simple remedy? (Shadow)
- Has a doctor ever prescribed you anything that you were skeptical of? Do you know any home remedies that may be simpler than a prescribed medication? What do you think the best way to treat an illness is? (Experience, tied to health literacy)

The years went by, faster and faster, like a stone that rolls downhill. The last few were the worst, and Juan Holgado gave them a very hostile reception. (Caballero 34).

Coordinator note: Though time may be an abstract idea, Caballero describes it almost like a character that Juan Holgado must oppose. Thus we see the contrast and confrontation of Juan
Holgado vs. Time. This is an unavoidable opposition, but Juan Holgado appears to fight it more than most, refusing to accept that time will pass.

- When the author writes, “Juan Holgado gave them [the years] a very hostile reception” what do you think they mean? Can Juan Holgado stop the years from coming? Why is Juan Holgado so upset that time is passing? What happens to our bodies as we age? (Contrast and confrontations)

- How do you feel about aging? What scares you the most about time passing? Is time the only thing that causes us to age, if not what else? Can we prevent aging and how? (Experience, tied to health literacy)

“Madam Death,” Juan Holgado said to her very crossly, “you told me that you wouldn’t come as long as my house didn’t tumble down, so in spite of your messages I didn’t expect you.”

“Well,” Death responded, “has not your strength left you? Have not your teeth and hair fallen out? Your body is your house.”

“I didn’t know that, Madam,” said the invalid, “and therefore taking you at your word, your coming surprises me.”

“So much the worse for you, Juan Holgado,” Death replied, “since my arrival never surprises or alarms the person who’s always prepared, but you’re all blind if you don’t know that you’re born to suffer and that you die to rest.” (Caballero 35).

Coordinator note: The word and interpretation of the word “house” is essential to the plot and meaning of the story. The poetic landscape of the story is greatly impacted by Juan Holgado’s misinterpretation.

- How does Juan Holgado interpret Death’s warning when she tells him that she will come for him only when “his house tumbles”? What did she really mean? How would you have interpreted Death’s warning and do you agree with her definition of “house” or Juan Holgado’s? Why? (Poetic Landscape)
What words have you used to describe your health or body that may not be originally intended for such use? Have you ever had a miscommunication like the one Juan Holgado and Death had? (Experience)

**Final Conclusions**

*I feel less human ...* After months of writing, months of grappling with the questions: What is literacy? Why should we care? Angél’s words still run through my thoughts. Attaining literacy, in today’s “age of information”, has essentially become synonymous with being human. Today’s society is dependent on reading, sharing information, communicating at speeds never before anticipated. Imagine having the inability to navigate that. Imagine the world going silent because you could not read, because you could not critically think about the words on the page before you.

In the United States, we are living in a time that is increasingly more interested in “tests-and-standards”, formalizing the school system to a point no better than the “vessel style” of teaching described by Paulo Freire (Kozol 54; Freire 32). We are living in a world where “schools in which as few as 3 or 4 percent of students may be white or Southeast Asian or of Middle Eastern origin, for instance—and where every other child in the building is black or Hispanic—are referred to as "diverse." Visitors to schools like these discover quickly the eviscerated meaning of the word, which is no longer a proper adjective but a euphemism for a plainer word that has apparently become unspeakable” (Kozol 43). Whether it is a lack of interest, a lack of resources, or a lack of recognition, more and more people in the United States are leaving the educational system without a critical awareness of the world around them and sometimes without functional literacy skills, that is if they even make it through the system at all.

Non-formal education has been proven to be a useful tool in times like these. The cases of Spain, Cuba, and Nicaragua have shown that even in some of the most “backwards” of social
situations, the most oppressive of formal school systems, the most lacking of educational attention, under the right conditions an entire population can change the course of oppression and find liberation through literacy. Yes, there is a “myth” surrounding literacy. We automatically report literacy rates with infant mortality rates and measures of GDP, blindly believing that if we can read, we will be inherently economically successful. However, as I have discussed, literacy can be a transformative force when considered as much more than just a functional skill. When we define literacy as an emancipatory, critically conscious competency, we recognize the liberating force behind reading both the “word and the world” (Freire 20). The Pedagogical Missions demonstrated the unifying power of establishing a common identity through culture. The Cuban Literacy Campaign exemplified the use of critical pedagogy and popular education to achieve both short term and longer term literacy success. Finally, the Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade exhibited the power of conscientization through multiple literacies as a means to recreate a national identity and rewrite an entire people’s history. These three case studies have demonstrated the power of non-formal education through literacy movements given proper social revolution, political will, a clearly defined guiding metaphor, an applied definition of literacy, and a cornerstone form of art. In order to draw these conclusions, I presented the “oppressive” or colored histories of each country with respect to education prior to each literacy initiative. I then detailed the means by which each country conducted the campaign, in addition to the outcomes, lessons, and potential critiques. As a result, these shared conclusions have been drawn. Perhaps a bit hackneyed, but always true: *Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it*51. At the very least, we as educators and concerned educational advocates in the United States must recognize that we are in a position to repeat the past and to regress back to illiteracy. But in the past, there are also

51 Jorge Agustín Nicolás Ruiz de Santayana y Borrás (1905), Spanish philosopher
lessons on how to right the wrongs manifesting themselves throughout our formal education system through the creation of critical literacy, most likely by non-formal means.

This critical consciousness is essential to create able and active members of society, free from oppression and able to navigate the world for themselves. This critical consciousness can be found in general literacy but also by way of more specialized literacy forms. In a nation that also finds itself failing patients in the medical system, the need for health literacy skills has become evident, but only to a small few. Therefore, in order to combat a more manageable problem from a grassroots or small organization approach, I have proposed a health literacy campaign that employs the use of the program “People and Stories”. A program that can be enacted as a cultural studies alternative to a public health program, we can develop health competency in addition to a form of critical consciousness. This program can more easily be conducted on a local level rather than the national level, which is only beneficial given the current lack of political will to promote a national literacy campaign. Hopefully, the future holds enough “social revolution”, in whatever form that may present itself in, and accompanied political will that we as a nation can hold a literacy movement that addresses the current shortcomings in our system. For now, I believe that a smaller scale health literacy campaign is a step in the right direction.

As a result of this work, I have developed an even more heightened sense of the importance of cultural studies across disciplines, especially within medicine and social science. Literacy, culture, and critical consciousness can help us through a plethora of situations that we may encounter. Literacy, although not directly, does affect an individual’s, a community’s, and a nation’s success. If I was not before, I am now an advocate of educational reform, of literacy, of critical thinking. At some point or another, we all come to the conclusion that literacy is important and worth fighting for, for Spain it was in 1931, Cuba in 1961, and Nicaragua in 1980, and for me
in 2017. When will you reach that conclusion? When will our nation reach that conclusion? The
answer is sooner rather than later, I hope.
Appendix A. “Juan Holgado and Death” by Fernán Caballero

“Juan Holgado and Death”

FERNÁN CABALLERO

Well, sir, there once lived a man whose name was Juan Holgado, or John Well-To-Do, and in truth it could not have been a greater misnomer, for the poor devil, far from being comfortably off, had no money to speak of and barely kept the wolf from the door. But on the other hand he did have a host of children with voracious appetites.

One day Juan Holgado said to his wife: “These kids are a bunch of gluttons capable of devouring the wicks of the oil lamps. I’d like to feast on a rabbit all by myself, at my leisure, without these wofhounds who eat me out of house and home.”

His wife, who was a saint and did not wish to see him quarrel with the children, sold a dozen eggs laid by her hens, bought a rabbit, stewed it, and said to her husband the following morning: “I’ve put a stewed rabbit and half a loaf of bread in your pack. Go out in the country to eat and enjoy your meal.”

Juan Holgado did not have to be told twice; he picked up the pack and started to run as fast as his legs would carry him. After he had gone four and a half miles, he sat down at the foot of an olive tree, pleased as Punch, commended his soul to Our Lady of Solitude, took the pot with the rabbit from his pack, and began to eat. But then all of a sudden he saw, without knowing where she came from or how she got there, an old woman sitting across from him. Dressed in black and uglier than sin, she was yellower and leaner than ancient parchment, her eyes were sunken and lifeless like a lamp without oil, her mouth looked like a frail, and, as for her nose, if she ever had one, no trace of it remained.

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It did not please Juan Holgado to see that company appear out of nowhere, but what was he to do?
As he was not a barbarian, he asked her if she would like to eat.
As the old woman wished nothing else, she replied that in order not to be rude she would accept his offer, and so she started to eat.
My friends, that wasn’t eating, it was devouring!
What ravenous hunger! In nothing flat she polished off the entire rabbit.
“Well, if this isn’t the darnedest thing,”* Juan Holgado mused. “Wouldn’t it have been better if my children had eaten the rabbit rather than this devil of an old woman? It’s clear that nothing goes right for an unlucky person!”
When the old woman had finished it, not leaving even the tail, she said: “Juan Holgado, I really enjoyed the rabbit.”
“So I see,” he replied.
“I want to repay the courtesy.”
“May you live a thousand years,” Juan Holgado said sarcastically as he eyed the old woman’s decrepitude.
“I shall,” the latter replied. “Besides, I’m somewhat older than that, seeing that I’m Death in person.”
Juan Holgado nearly jumped out of his skin.
“Don’t be alarmed, Juan Holgado, it’s not your time yet. To repay your kindness I’m going to give you a piece of advice: become a doctor, and I assure you that no one in the world will be more famous or earn more money.”
“Madam Death, I’ll be happy if you don’t remember me for a goodly number of years. As to the rest, becoming a doctor isn’t for me.”
“And why not?”
“Because I have no formal education.”
“It doesn’t matter.”
“Madam, I know neither Latin nor Greek.”
“It’s not important.”
“Madam, I don’t even know geography.”
“That’s immaterial.”
“Madam, I don’t know how to count beyond the number 1.”
“It makes no difference.”
“Madam, I don’t know how to write because my hand shakes, and I don’t know how to read because all that black ink confuses me.”
“What, again?” said Death in a devil of a humor as a result of so many obstacles. “Hang it all, Juan Holgado, but you have a bomb-proof skull! Haven’t I been telling you for an hour that it’s not important, that it’s not important? I tell you I don’t give a hoot about doctors’ knowledge; I don’t come and go because they summon or dismiss me. I do whatever I want to and laugh at doctors because, when I feel like it, I grab someone by the ear and carry him off. When the world was first populated, there were no doctors and for that reason it was done quickly and well, and since the invention of doctors it has been the end of Methusalehs. You will indeed become a doctor, and if you refuse, you will—make no mistake—come with me. Now, listen and pay attention. Never prescribe anything except water in an earthen jar. Do you understand?”

“Yes, I understand,” said Juan Holgado, who was furious with Death and more desirous of slapping her than listening to her.

“If when you enter a bedroom you see me sitting at the patient’s bedside, say unequivocally that he’s dying, that there’s no cure, and that they should get him ready. If, on the contrary, I’m not there, assure him he’s not dying and prescribe water in an earthen jar.”

And with this the ugly woman took her leave, making a curtsy in the French manner.

“Madam,” Juan Holgado said to her, “I wouldn’t want to say goodbye with Until we meet again, and I don’t expect that you will be all that anxious to visit me either, because it’s not every day that I have a rabbit with which to treat myself, and the one that I had has completely disappeared.”

“Don’t worry, Juan Holgado,” Death replied. “As long as you don’t see your house tumble down, I won’t show up there.”

Juan Holgado went back and related to his wife everything that had happened to him, and his wife, who was cleverer than he, told him that he could believe everything that the old woman had said because there was nothing more sure and certain than Death.

She speedily spread word all around that her husband was a doctor like few others and that all he had to do was look at a patient to know whether that person would live or die.

One Sunday, a number of girls in high spirits had gathered at the doorway of a house when Juan Holgado happened to pass by.
"There goes Juan Holgado," said one of them, "who's claiming to be a doctor after all this time."
"Yes. The nerve! Coming out with that nonsense after all these years seems like a joke. Do you suppose the old crock, who's about as dim-witted as they come, thinks that all he has to do is say something and people will believe it? He's putting on airs to be called Don Juan, and the Don suits him as well as a top hat does a donkey."
And they all began to sing:

Don Juan Holgado  
looks like a bunch  
of pinks there  
on the corner.

"Shall we play a trick on the conceited old fool?" asked one of the other girls. "I'll pretend to be sick and I bet he falls for it."
No sooner said than done. The girls set down a basket of prickly pears that they were eating, and in no time at all the one who thought up the joke was in between sheets moaning pitifully. The others, stifling their laughter, ran after Juan Holgado.
Juan came back with them, and when he entered the house he noticed a pile of prickly pear peels by the doorway. In the bedroom the first thing he ran into was Death, who was sitting at the head of the bed, the picture of gravity.
"She is very ill," Juan Holgado said, and then he left.
"Well, what's the matter with her?" asked the girls, who contained their laughter only with great difficulty.
"She's gorged herself on prickly pears," he answered, "and won't live to tell about it."
Juan Holgado went away and two hours later the girl was in the presence of God. I leave to your imagination, my friends, the fame that this incident brought to Juan Holgado.
There was no seriously ill person anywhere not attended by Juan, no meeting that he did not sit in on, and he made money hand over fist, so much that he did not know what to do with it. He bought his children a noble title and the insignias that they wore on their garb; as for himself, he wanted no hanging medallions, only to live well. And consequently he became so fat, so rotund, and so portly that it was a pleasure to see him with his round face, massive legs, sausage-like fingers, and
bulging potbelly.

All this time Juan Holgado took extremely good care of his house. When as youngsters his children had done some damage to it, as punishment their father had done some to their hides. He retained a bricklayer on annual wages to do repairs, remembering what Death had said to him, that as long as his house did not tumble down she would not show up there.

The years went by, faster and faster, like a stone that rolls downhill. The last few were the worst, and Juan Holgado gave them a very hostile reception. They, by way of revenge, made off first with his hair, and then with his teeth, and afterward they curved his spine, making it look like a sickle, and gave him a limp on top of that. One day he became ill and Death sent him her regards through a bat, which did not amuse Juan Holgado in the slightest. Another day his pituitary gland acted up and Death sent him a message through an owl that soon she would visit him, and Juan Holgado told the owl to go to blazes. Another day he had an accident and Death let him know through a dog that began to howl at his door that she was on her way. Juan Holgado threw his crutch at the dog and told it to go to hell (I say hell so as not to use a stronger word because I know to whom I am speaking, and although coarse—I was brought up in the wild—I know good manners, which my father taught me with an olive-wood "primer"). The invalid got worse and Death knocked at the door. Juan Holgado ordered that it be bolted and also that it not be opened, but Death slipped in through a crack.

"Madam Death," Juan Holgado said to her very crossly, "you told me you wouldn't come as long as my house didn't tumble down, so in spite of your messages I didn't expect you."

"Well," Death responded, "has not your strength left you? Have not your teeth and hair fallen out? Your body is your house."

"I didn't know that, madam," said the invalid, "and therefore, taking you at your word, your coming surprises me."

"So much the worse for you, Juan Holgado," Death replied, "since my arrival never surprises or alarms the person who's always prepared, but you're all blind if you don't know that you're born to suffer and that you die to rest."
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