2012

SÃ se puede... Â¿leer?: Assessing the Success of the Cuban and Nicaraguan Literacy Initiatives

Camille Lyn Lesseig

Sí se puede... ¿leer?
Assessing Success of the Cuban and Nicaraguan Literacy Initiatives

by
Camille Lesseig

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

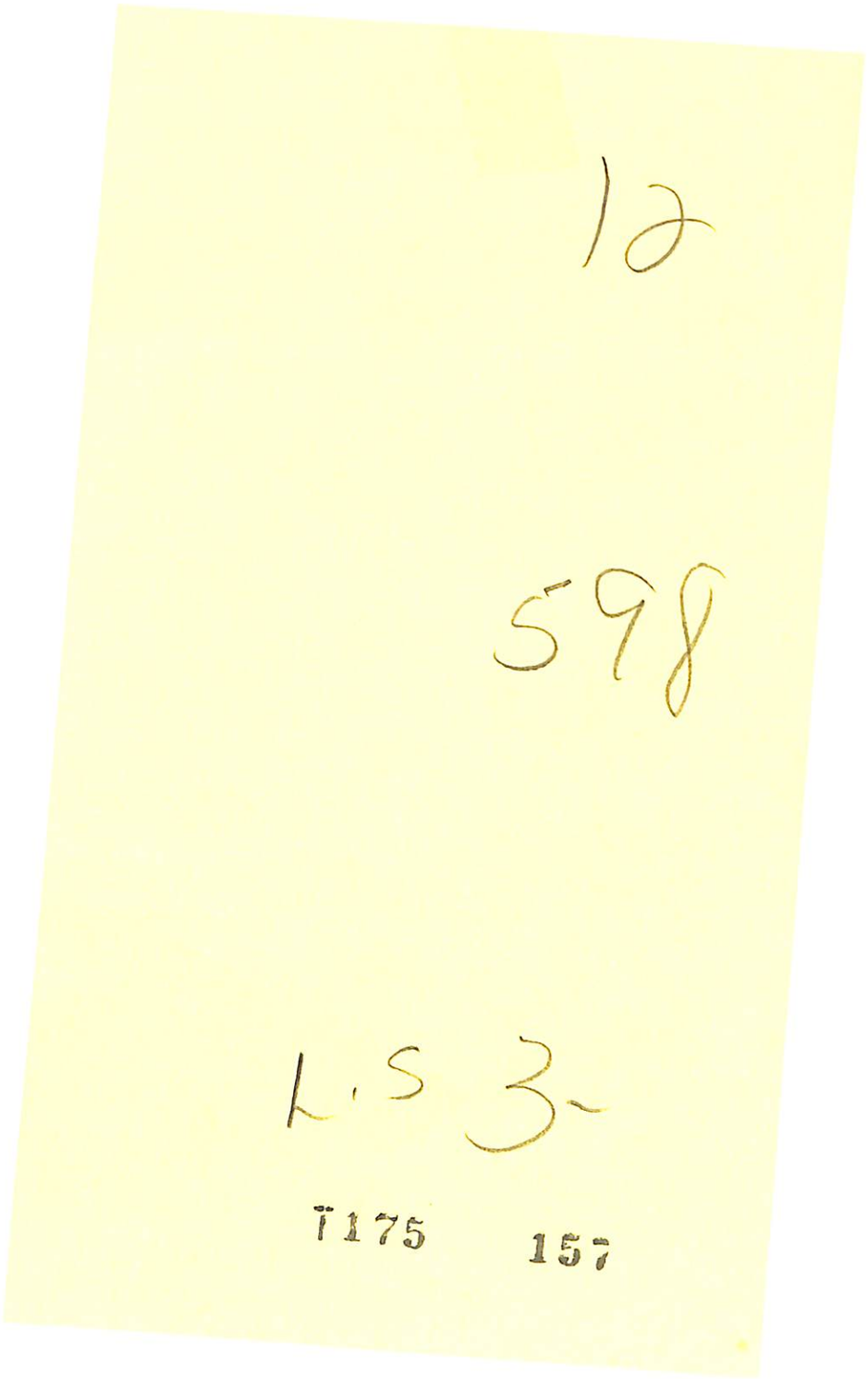
Oxford
May 2012

Approved by

Advisor: Professor Douglass Sullivan-Gonzalez

Reader: Luanne Buchanan

Reader: Timothy Nordstrom



ABSTRACT

Sí se puede... ¿leer? Assessing Success of the Cuban and Nicaraguan Literacy Initiatives
(Under the direction of Douglass Sullivan-Gonzalez)

This research examines the literacy programs conducted in 1961 Cuba and 1980 Nicaragua. Given the similarities in the structure and implementation of the plan as well as the congruencies in rhetoric promoting the plans, this thesis explores the various internal and external variables that affected each country's program to better understand the widely different results. To research these countries' programs, I examined both primary and secondary source material related to each country, their educational programs specifically, as well as information about US foreign policy relationships with the countries during this time. Although both programs were initially successful in reducing illiteracy rates, the Cuban program remains the more sustainable success of the two educational endeavors. The Cuban government's substantial and sustained investment in infrastructure including roads, and schools, in the years following the official close of the Cuban Literacy Campaign most contributed to the country's overall success in addressing illiteracy. The inability to reinvest in their state educational system and the lack of domestic stability rendered Nicaragua unable to maintain the lower levels of illiteracy attained during the "crusade."

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to the poor souls who endured my incessant discussion of anything even tangentially related to Cuba or Nicaragua much less their literacy initiatives.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In reference to writing Kurt Vonnegut once said, "We have to continuously be jumping off cliffs and developing our wings on the way down." Although Vonnegut was referring to the pitfalls and failures frequently encountered in writing fiction, his sentiment resonates well in reflecting upon my experience writing this senior thesis. In saying this, I would like to thank those who helped me to "develop my wings." Specifically, I extend a considerable amount of thanks to my ever-patient advisor, Dr. Douglass Sullivan-Gonzalez, whose direction and occasional prodding proved invaluable to this project. I would also like to thank my readers, Dr. Luanne Buchanan and Dr. Timothy Nordstrom for their guidance and assistance throughout the writing of this thesis. Finally, my family and friends also deserve a considerable amount of thanks for their continued support of me, especially at my most insufferable.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Political revolution, restoration, and nearly constant turmoil characterized the twentieth century experiences of many countries in Latin America; Cuba and Nicaragua serve as no exceptions. Although unique from one another, the histories of Cuba and Nicaragua converge at some points. The most notable convergence included the development and implementation of several social reform programs by the revolutionary parties soon after attaining power in each country. Following the removal of long-standing dictators, the victorious revolutionary parties in Cuba and Nicaragua began ambitious programs dedicated to social reform. These programs included initiatives relating to public health, voter initiatives, infrastructure projects, and most importantly, education.

Shortly after gaining power, the newly established ruling groups in Cuba and Nicaragua launched literacy programs to combat the high levels of illiteracy within each country. Designed to be short-term, high intensity efforts focused on rural regions, the Cuban Literacy Campaign of 1961 and Nicaragua's 1980 National Literacy Crusade depended primarily on the work of volunteers to reach out to illiterate populations across each country to teach them basic language and math skills. Within months, both programs dramatically reduced levels of Spanish illiteracy within their respective nations and received similar prizes from UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) for their efforts to address illiteracy.[1]

This thesis examines how Cuba and Nicaragua similarly designed, structured, and implemented their literacy programs as part of their revolutionary social programs. It also

---

[1] Nicaragua: 1980 Nadhezhda K. Krupskaya Literacy Award; Cuba: 2006 King Sejong Literacy Prize

considers the various internal as well as external externalities that benefitted or negatively impacted each program. Finally, this research demonstrates the extent to which these various internal and external factors affected Cuba and Nicaragua's ability to both carry out the programs initially and then preserve the gains made during each one. Although both programs were initially successful in reducing illiteracy rates, the Cuban program remains the more sustainable success of the two educational endeavors.

Colombia, Brazil, Peru, Chile and Costa Rica experienced similar political and social turmoil and achieved at least some degree of success through the implementation of their own literacy programs. Cuba and Nicaragua structured, organized and implemented similarly, and both countries attained some degree of success in addressing illiteracy through these programs. Each country experienced a different level of success and sustainability in its efforts to address illiteracy. A comparative study of Cuban and Nicaraguan programs will illuminate the numerous internal and external variables that explain the disparate outcomes reached by programs so seemingly similar in structure and content.

Although the literacy programs implemented in each country mirror one another in many ways, the relationship between these two countries extends beyond the congruities in their respective literacy initiatives and other social improvement programs. According to Robert Pastor, the very origins of the conflicts in Nicaragua and Cuba correlated in that they [along with Mexico's earlier revolution] "began as crises of political succession and only succeeded because virtually the entire nation agrees that the

problem was the dictator."[2] Struggling against similar political repression beneath dictatorial control, leaders in Cuba and Nicaragua (specifically members of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN)) developed a close relationship. When the Sandinistas defeated Somoza and his National Guard in 1979, this relationship between the two nations became more crucial. Following the exile of the remaining members of the National Guard to Honduras, Cuba worked furiously to help the struggling nation move forward after years of internal warfare.

An analogous rejection of perceived "Yankee imperialism" in Latin America also helped to forge the relationship between Cuba and Nicaragua. An oft-mentioned subject in many of Castro's speeches including his "Declaration of Havana," Nicaraguan revolutionary rhetoric contained this same theme. Shortly after the conclusion of the 1979 Nicaraguan Revolution, Daniel Ortega, one of the primary leaders of the FSLN, gave a speech in Havana and commended both the leadership and people of Cuba for freeing themselves from imperialist control as well as serving as inspiration for others in the region.[3] Although Cuban and Nicaraguan leaders referred to incidents unique to each country's history, their descriptions of these events in revolutionary rhetoric reflected a strong anti-imperialist sentiment. Castro and Ortega justified revolutions in both countries as rejections of American imperialism in addition to reactions to internal issues of political corruption and economic inequality.[4]

The Cuban government strongly supported revolutionary movements in countries across the hemisphere in the first ten years following the ousting of Fulgencio Batista in

---

[2] Robert A. Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 13.
[3] Tomás Borges, Carlos Fonesca, Daniel Ortega, Humberto Ortega, and Jaime Wheelock, *Sandinistas Spea,*. Edited by Bruce Marcus, (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1982), 44.
[4] Borges, Fonesca, Ortega, Ortega, Wheelock 26-29.

1959. Cuba provided material support as well as diplomatic or advisory assistance to a number of countries across Latin America.[5] Several factors contributed to Castro's willingness to provide support to other revolutionary movements. According to Gary Prevost, these factors included Castro's staunch opposition to what he perceived as the imperialistic actions of the United States against Cuba as well as his understanding of the Cuban Revolution within an international context.[6]

Castro's conceptualization of the Cuban Revolution within an international context led him to seek relationships with a variety of revolutionary leaders. Nicaragua's Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) represented one of the closest and most enduring. The relationship between Cuba and the FSLN in Nicaragua began when one of the founders of the FSLN, Carlos Fonseca, traveled to Cuba in 1959 to meet with Ernesto (Che) Guevara.[7] Prior to Fonseca's visit, the guerilla struggle in the Sierra Maestra inspired many in Nicaragua, and the Cuban Revolution in 1959 served as further inspiration for those hoping to unseat Somoza from power in their country.[8] Interaction between the Cuban government and members of the FSLN continued throughout the sixties, even after the shift in Cuban policy in 1968 to focus on internal issues.

After 1968, Cuba maintained its connection to the FSLN despite its internal focus and served as a sanctuary for many FSLN leaders targeted by Somoza and his National Guard as the situation in Nicaragua continued to worsen, following the 1972 earthquake.[9] Many in Cuba did not believe that a revolutionary movement in Nicaragua would be

---

[5] Gary Prevost, "Cuba and Nicaragua: A Special Relationship?" *Latin American Perspectives* 17 (1990): 121.
[6] Prevost 122.
[7] Prevost 122.
[8] Borges, Fonesca, Ortega, Ortega, Wheelock, 32-33, 54.
[9] Prevost123.

considers the various internal as well as external externalities that benefitted or negatively impacted each program. Finally, this research demonstrates the extent to which these various internal and external factors affected Cuba and Nicaragua's ability to both carry out the programs initially and then preserve the gains made during each one. Although both programs were initially successful in reducing illiteracy rates, the Cuban program remains the more sustainable success of the two educational endeavors.

Colombia, Brazil, Peru, Chile and Costa Rica experienced similar political and social turmoil and achieved at least some degree of success through the implementation of their own literacy programs. Cuba and Nicaragua structured, organized and implemented similarly, and both countries attained some degree of success in addressing illiteracy through these programs. Each country experienced a different level of success and sustainability in its efforts to address illiteracy. A comparative study of Cuban and Nicaraguan programs will illuminate the numerous internal and external variables that explain the disparate outcomes reached by programs so seemingly similar in structure and content.

Although the literacy programs implemented in each country mirror one another in many ways, the relationship between these two countries extends beyond the congruities in their respective literacy initiatives and other social improvement programs. According to Robert Pastor, the very origins of the conflicts in Nicaragua and Cuba correlated in that they [along with Mexico's earlier revolution] "began as crises of political succession and only succeeded because virtually the entire nation agrees that the

problem was the dictator."[2] Struggling against similar political repression beneath dictatorial control, leaders in Cuba and Nicaragua (specifically members of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN)) developed a close relationship. When the Sandinistas defeated Somoza and his National Guard in 1979, this relationship between the two nations became more crucial. Following the exile of the remaining members of the National Guard to Honduras, Cuba worked furiously to help the struggling nation move forward after years of internal warfare.

An analogous rejection of perceived "Yankee imperialism" in Latin America also helped to forge the relationship between Cuba and Nicaragua. An oft-mentioned subject in many of Castro's speeches including his "Declaration of Havana," Nicaraguan revolutionary rhetoric contained this same theme. Shortly after the conclusion of the 1979 Nicaraguan Revolution, Daniel Ortega, one of the primary leaders of the FSLN, gave a speech in Havana and commended both the leadership and people of Cuba for freeing themselves from imperialist control as well as serving as inspiration for others in the region.[3] Although Cuban and Nicaraguan leaders referred to incidents unique to each country's history, their descriptions of these events in revolutionary rhetoric reflected a strong anti-imperialist sentiment. Castro and Ortega justified revolutions in both countries as rejections of American imperialism in addition to reactions to internal issues of political corruption and economic inequality.[4]

The Cuban government strongly supported revolutionary movements in countries across the hemisphere in the first ten years following the ousting of Fulgencio Batista in

---

[2] Robert A. Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 13.
[3] Tomás Borges, Carlos Fonesca, Daniel Ortega, Humberto Ortega, and Jaime Wheelock, *Sandinistas Spea,*. Edited by Bruce Marcus, (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1982), 44.
[4] Borges, Fonesca, Ortega, Ortega, Wheelock 26-29.

1959. Cuba provided material support as well as diplomatic or advisory assistance to a number of countries across Latin America.[5] Several factors contributed to Castro's willingness to provide support to other revolutionary movements. According to Gary Prevost, these factors included Castro's staunch opposition to what he perceived as the imperialistic actions of the United States against Cuba as well as his understanding of the Cuban Revolution within an international context.[6]

Castro's conceptualization of the Cuban Revolution within an international context led him to seek relationships with a variety of revolutionary leaders. Nicaragua's Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) represented one of the closest and most enduring. The relationship between Cuba and the FSLN in Nicaragua began when one of the founders of the FSLN, Carlos Fonseca, traveled to Cuba in 1959 to meet with Ernesto (Che) Guevara.[7] Prior to Fonseca's visit, the guerilla struggle in the Sierra Maestra inspired many in Nicaragua, and the Cuban Revolution in 1959 served as further inspiration for those hoping to unseat Somoza from power in their country.[8] Interaction between the Cuban government and members of the FSLN continued throughout the sixties, even after the shift in Cuban policy in 1968 to focus on internal issues.

After 1968, Cuba maintained its connection to the FSLN despite its internal focus and served as a sanctuary for many FSLN leaders targeted by Somoza and his National Guard as the situation in Nicaragua continued to worsen, following the 1972 earthquake.[9] Many in Cuba did not believe that a revolutionary movement in Nicaragua would be

---

[5] Gary Prevost, "Cuba and Nicaragua: A Special Relationship?" *Latin American Perspectives* 17 (1990): 121.
[6] Prevost 122.
[7] Prevost 122.
[8] Borges, Fonesca, Ortega, Ortega, Wheelock, 32-33, 54.
[9] Prevost123.

successful. Nonetheless, the FSLN-led offensive against the National Guard in September of 1978 shifted the Cuban view toward Nicaragua. Following the offensive, Cuba actively worked to ensure success for their Nicaraguan allies.[10] Initially, Cuba provided limited assistance to their Nicaraguan allies. Aside from Castro's role in uniting the various factions within the FSLN in 1979, Cuba remained relatively neutral until after the eventual triumph of the Sandinistas in August 1979.

With the success of the Sandinistas over the National Guard and the subsequent removal of Somoza from power, the relationship between Cuba and Sandinista-led Nicaragua grew even closer as Cuba became an integral part of Nicaragua's diversified dependency plan for development. Prevost asserts that Cuban naturally gravitated toward Nicaragua as the triumph of the Sandinistas led Castro as well as other Cuban leaders to believe that "their revolutionary hopes for Latin America still had limited possibilities."[11] In a speech given on July 26, 1979, to commemorate the anniversary of the 1953 Moncada attack, Castro pledged Cuba's assistance to the new, Sandinista government. Castro called its Cuba's "fraternal duty to help Nicaragua."[12]

Despite their close relationship to the Cuban government, Sandinista leaders in Nicaragua made a concerted effort to avoid aligning too closely with their Caribbean ally to allay suspicions in other countries, particularly the decidedly anti-Cuba United States. Sandinista leaders like Daniel Ortega emphasized the internal nature of the struggle in Nicaragua and refuted claims of intervention from a host of Latin American nations,

---

[10] Prevost 124; Michael H. Erisman, *Cuba's International Relation: The Anatomy of a Nationalistic Foreign Policy*, (Boulder: Westview, 1985): 89.
[11] Prevost 130.
[12] George Black and John Bevan. *The loss of fear: education in Nicaragua before and after the revolution.* (Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign: World University Service, 1980), 45.

particularly Cuba.[13] Straddling a "narrow path between their dreams and their capabilities," leaders in the newly established Nicaraguan government sought to ingratiate themselves to many countries, of which Cuba remained a most vociferous proponent of the Sandinista regime.[14]

In addition to providing financial assistance as part of Nicaragua's "diversified dependency" plan, Cuba also played a diplomatic role in developing trade agreements between Nicaragua and the Soviet Union, nations in Western Europe, and other countries in Latin America. Directly following the Nicaraguan Revolution, the Cuban government provided assistance to educational, medicine and health, and construction/ infrastructure development initiatives in Nicaragua. 1,200 Cuban primary teachers, technicians and advisors helped organize rural education and worked on agrarian reform measures. Cuban physicians also provided additional support once Nicaragua began its Literacy Crusade in the following year.[15]

Although Cuba offered some form of assistance to many facets of Nicaraguan life under the newly established Sandinista government, Cuba concentrated its efforts in Nicaragua on education. In addition to eventually providing around 2,000 teachers to the nascent government, Cuba offered pedagogical preparation for Nicaraguan teachers. Cuba's educational assistance also included technical training for Nicaraguan workers in Cuba, donations of books, and the creation of exchange programs for faculty and students at Cuban and Nicaraguan universities.[16] Cuban assistance proved particularly crucial both during the planning and later implementation of Nicaragua's National Literacy Crusade.

---

[13] Tomás Borges, Carlos Fonesca, Daniel Ortega, Humberto Ortega, and Jaime Wheelock 44-45.
[14] Pastor 214.
[15] Black and Bevan 44-45.
[16] Prevost 126-7.

Cuban advisors and participants provided "technical assistance and advice" based on their knowledge and experienced gained during the 1961 Cuban campaign.[17]

Why Education?

The revolutionary governments in Cuba and Nicaragua embarked on a series of political, social, and cultural reforms after taking power from Batista and Somoza respectively. These endeavors included health initiatives and the expansion of political freedoms, but what made Cuba and Nicaragua's focus on education through massive, nationwide literacy campaigns so notable? The efficiency and dedication of both countries toward literacy programs deserves recognition for both accomplishing so much in such little time, and the longevity of the results-- especially in considering the Cuban model. As the quality of education in Latin America "varie[d] from the moderately good to the lamentable," another feature that warrants attention is the degree of success given the circumstances of public education in each of the countries prior to the start of each literacy initiative.[18]

Each of the revolutionary government's focus on education and more specifically universal literacy highlighted the importance of this facet of improvement as a key to increasing the standard of living in both countries. Cuban and Nicaraguan leaders understood and promoted the notion that an illiterate populace preempted the ability of any ruling body to substantially affect or improve the state of the country or its inhabitants' lives. In developing the programs in each country, Cuban and Nicaraguan leaders also considered the political expediency in creating a newly literate populace to generate support for their other revolutionary programs. Therefore, both countries created

---

[17] Prevost 126.
[18] Black and Bevan 15.

plans with decidedly political messages to promote not just a sense of national pride but more specifically a pride focused on the revolutionary groups' contributions to the countries. Similarly motivated by a desire to generate political support in addition to lowering illiteracy, organizers in Cuba and Nicaragua also structured their respective literacy programs analogously, breaking from the more traditional teaching methods utilized in other literacy programs, especially those supported by UNESCO. The eventual implementation of the programs in1961 and 1980 also mirrored one another with young people leading the charge into the battle against illiteracy.

Despite the similar development, structure, and implementation of literacy programs in Cuba and Nicaragua, the 1961 National Literacy Campaign yielded more substantive results with regard to lowering levels of illiteracy within the country. In 1961, the Cuba government reported a reduction in illiteracy across the country from 25% to around 3.9%. Some towns and provinces claimed to have eliminated illiteracy entirely. On November 5, 1961, Melena del Sur, a village in Havana Province, became the first area in Cuba to declare itself a "Territorio libre de analfabetismo" (illiteracy-free territory), and other towns and provinces followed until the official end of the Campaign in 1961.[19] Nicaragua reported a reduction from 50.3% to 12.9% following its program in 1980. Cutting the rate of illiteracy by over half reflects a great deal of success albeit not as numerically significant as Cuba's. The actions taken in subsequent years, however, served to differentiate between the programs as Cuba not only managed to maintain the gains made during its initial program but continued to make headway in improving its overall educational system, reducing illiteracy to its current level of 2%-- one of the

---

[19] Jonathan Kozol, *Children of the Revolution: A Yankee Teacher in the Cuban School,* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1978), 53.

lowest in the world. Although initially successful, Nicaragua failed to maintain its original inroads toward eliminating illiteracy, with approximately 26% of the Nicaraguan people currently classified as illiterate.[20]

But with such similar programs, the difference in results raises the question: why? To address this, one must consider how the numerous internal as well as external variables affected the programs both positively and negatively to explain the incongruencies in the results of the programs. Naturally, these variables altered both the short-term effectiveness as well as the long-term success of the initial programs. Internally, infrastructure most significantly affected each program, and the success of efforts in Cuba and Nicaragua depended heavily existence and continued reinvestment in infrastructure projects. Investments in infrastructure included building and maintaining roads, primary and secondary schools, and availability of electricity. Additionally, the timing of the campaign, the financial state of the country at the outset and after the campaign, linguistic differences, and the role of the Catholic Church as well as other religious organizations within the country affected each country's program, in conjunction with the external variables that also influenced each initiative.

Significant external forces exerted influence on each country's attempt to address illiteracy. The Cold War and more specifically the shift in the United States' relationship with each country most heavily impacted the effectiveness of the work done during Cuba and Nicaragua's respective literacy programs. Because the relationship between each country and the United States affected each program, the shift in US policy at the outset of the 1980s proved extremely detrimental to the Nicaraguan program and the country's

---

[20] Figures for literacy retrieved from the CIA's World Fact Book

ability to sustain the gains made during its 1980 National Literacy Crusade. Educational and financial assistance from outside nations and other non-governmental organizations as well as pedagogical input from outside groups or individuals also had an impact on the literacy programs in Cuba and Nicaragua.

Historiographical Analysis

Implemented at the outset of a Latin American revolutionary governments' ruling tenure, both the 1961 Cuban Literacy Campaign and the 1980 National Literacy Crusade in Nicaragua sought to reduce rates of illiteracy. Targeting primarily rural populations, volunteers traversed Cuba and Nicaragua teaching their countrymen basic reading and writing skills. Revolutionary leaders in both Cuba and Nicaragua intended to rest their ambitious sets of social reforms upon the base of successful literacy programs. By reaching populations previously underserved or entirely ignored by former governments, Castro and the Sandinistas hoped their respective literacy programs would draw in a wide range of supporters for their revolutionary agendas. However, the rationale behind implementing nationwide literacy programs in Cuba and Nicaragua extends beyond politics. Both ruling groups realized the vital need for a literate populace to spur economic development in each of the woefully underdeveloped nations.

Although a poignant point in both the Cuban and Nicaraguan historical narratives, few scholars have researched these countries' programs in-depth. Given the lack of serious scholarship toward the Cuban or the Nicaraguan efforts to reduce illiteracy, a great deal remains to be studied to better understand the interworking of both programs and how each country managed to attain the level of success it did considering its

particular implementation. The most accessible literature currently available concerning the 1961 Cuban Campaign and 1980 Nicaraguan Crusade exists in the form of personal memoirs or journals kept by participants in both the Cuban and Nicaraguan literacy programs.[21] These personal narratives, particularly those Although personal memoirs written by program participants in Cuba and Nicaragua provide insight into the experiences shared by those working in both countries as well as invaluable ethnographic, qualitative information about the two programs, there remains a need for more quantitative analyses of each program to better understand the successes as well as the shortcomings of the initiatives.

A preeminent scholar in modern Cuban history, Louis A. Pérez's *Essays on Cuban History: Historiography and Research* serves as an excellent starting point from which to search for further information about this country, and his *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution* provides more in-depth information concerning 20th century Cuba.[22] Written from a more journalistic perspective, some have criticized Richard Gott's *Cuba: A New History* for its sympathies toward the revolution and particularly Castro's revolutionary aims. [23] Gott's supposed sympathies for revolutionary measures in Cuba stem from the social and cultural focus of his work in that Gott argues that the revolution drastically altered the social interactions and relationships of most Cubans, something substantiated by the experience of the 1961 Literacy Crusade.

---

[21] Valerie Miller, *Between Struggle and Hope: The Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade*, (Westview, 1985); Jonathan Kozol; Sheryl Hirshon and Judy Butler, *And Also Teach Them to Read*, (Westport: Lawrence Hill & Company, 1983).

[22] Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, (New York: Oxford University Press); *Louis A. Pérez, Jr., Essays on Cuban History: Historiography and Research*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995).

[23] Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

Thomas Walker's revised edition survey of modern Nicaraguan history provides a readable and concise overview of 20th century Nicaraguan history.[24] The updated version of Walker's Nicaraguan narrative heavily emphasizes the continued involvement of the United States in the country's most recent history. As one of the first to publish about the Sandinista Revolution, Walker portrays the Sandinistas relatively sympathetically, and asserts that outside influence from the United States most detrimentally affected the ruling groups' efforts. Although Walker's placing of blame on the actions of the United States is not wholly unfounded, his downplaying or discounting of internal issues like the political rifts between the FSLN and others like Violeta Barrios Chamorro and the UNO as well as within the party itself introduces a certain level of bias into his work. Donald Hodges, although still critical of the actions of the United States toward Nicaragua, discusses at greater length the internal issues destabilizing both the FSLN and the country of Nicaragua as a whole, and in a way, works to balance Walker's externally focused Nicaraguan narrative.[25]

Donald Hodges and Shirley Christian, take relatively oppositional views when assessing the political motivations driving the Sandinistas social reform. Writing from a more politically conservative perspective, Christian writes rather disparagingly of Sandinista leadership and the FSLN's political motivations in implementing their various social reform efforts. [26] Whereas Christian asserts the Sandinistas intended to lead the country in a manner highly analogous to the totalitarian structure pursued by Castro, Hodges refutes this claim, highlighting the FSLN's continued efforts to ingratiate

---

[24] Thomas Walker, *Living in the Shadow of the Eagle, Fourth Ed.*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 2003).
[25] Donald Hodges, *Intellectual Foundations of the Nicaraguan Revolution;* Thomas Walker, *Living in the Shadow of the Eagle, Fourth Ed.*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 2003).
[26] Shirley Christian, *Nicaragua: Revolution in the Family, with new material on the Contra*

themselves to a number of politically disparate countries and organizations. Hodges' presentation of the Nicaraguan ruling party starkly contrasts Christian's portrayal of the Sandinistas as a group heavily dependent on outside influence. Hodges assigns the Sandinistas a greater degree of political autonomy, and although they cooperated and communicated with Soviet bloc nations as well as Cuba, Hodges argues they maintained a distinct degree of ideological independence.

Jonathan Kozol and Theodore MacDonald provide differing although not oppositional views of the Cuban educational program prior to and following the 1961 Campaign. Written as more of an ethnographic study, Kozol examined the lives of former literacy workers and participants in the Cuban Campaign, focusing on the program from a more ethnographic or individual-driven perspective.[27] MacDonald, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of the Cuban state in the successful carrying out of the campaign and particularly in implementing the various follow up programs.[28] Given the extremely significant role of the Cuban state securing the success of its literacy campaign through substantial, continued investments in education, MacDonald's institutionally focused survey of Cuban education more accurately reflects program's structure and ability to succeed. Both Marvin Leiner and Sheryl Lutjens echo MacDonald's institutionally driven view of the program in their articles focused on more specific aspects of the Cuban program.[29]

---

[27] Jonathan Kozol, *Children of the Revolution: A Yankee Teacher in the Cuban Schools*, (New York: Delacorte Press, 1978).
[28] Theodore MacDonald, *Making a New People: Education in Revolutionary Cuba*, (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1985).
[29] Marvin Leiner, "The 1961 National Cuban Literacy Campaign," in *National Literacy Campaigns: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. by Robert F. Arnove and Harvey J. Graff, 173-196. (New York: Plenum Press, 1987); Sheryl L. Lutjens, "Women, Education, and the State in Revolutionary Cuba,"

Kozol's approach is very similar to the later narratives penned by Valerie Miller and Sheryl Hirshon and Judy Butler about the Nicaraguan Crusade in 1980. Miller and Hirshon and Butler attribute success in the Nicaraguan Crusade to the volunteers participating in the campaign itself rather than a state or political entity such as the FSLN.[30] As the Nicaraguan government played a much smaller role in funding and organizing the campaign, relying almost entirely on outside funding and individual or group support, these "ground up" presentations of the Nicaraguan Crusade offer a more accurate depiction of the Crusade in trying to better understand its success.

George Black and John Bevan's investigation of the Nicaraguan educational system just prior to and after the revolution provides data crucial to a better understanding of the internal variables affecting the Nicaraguan effort.[31] Although not staunchly pro-FSLN, Black and Bevan's report places a considerable amount of blame on the Somoza regime for the deplorable state of education in Nicaragua at the time of the Nicaraguan Revolution. In placing so much blame on the Somoza regime, Black and Bevan emphasize the considerable impediments placed before the Sandinistas, particularly those related to institutional shortcomings resulting from Somoza's tenure as head of Nicaragua.

Speeches given by Fidel Castro as well as influential members of the FSLN provide the rationale behind the development of the campaigns and explain the

---

in *Latin American Education: Comparative Perspectives*, Edited by Carlos Alberto Torres and Adriana Puiggros, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997): 289-319.

[30] Valerie Miller, *Between Struggle and Hope: The Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade*, (Boulder: Westview, 1985); Sheryl Hirshon and Judy Butler, *And Also Teach them to Read*, (Westport: Lawrence Hill & Company, 1983).

[31] George Black and John Bevan

importance of the literacy programs within a revolutionary context.[32] Literacy remains a central theme in many of the speeches and writings of these leaders, and the documents also evidence both ruling groups' intention to use the literacy movements in the development of the "new man," a topic discussed to a greater extent both by Cuban Revolutionary Ernesto "Che" Guevara as well as French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre.[33] These sources, particularly the emphasis on the emergence of a post-revolutionary "new man," evidence the Marxist leanings of the leaders in both countries. An understandable amount of bias characterizes each of these documents and revolutionary leaders used these speeches and writings as propaganda to promote their respective ruling groups. Despite their partiality, they remain essential as they provide an understanding of the public portrayal of each literacy program by the Cuban and Nicaraguan governments, and to some extent, justify the appeal and attractive presentation of each program to potential volunteers or participants. Fred Judson's "Sandinista Revolutionary Morale" offers a more objective view of Sandinista rhetoric in particular, making it an invaluable source in evaluating statements made by leaders of the FSLN.[34]

Reports published by UNESCO and other researchers working in the Cuban and Nicaraguan Ministry of Education provide invaluable statistical data regarding the campaigns and the subsequent actions taken by each country following the close of the

---

[32] Fidel Castro, "First Declaration of Havana" (speech given to Cuban people, Havana, Cuba, September 2, 1960); Fidel Castro, "The Problem of Cuba and its Revolutionary Policy," (Speech given at the meeting of the United Nations, New York, New York, September 26, 1960); Tomás Borges, Carlos Fonesca, Daniel Ortega, Humberto Ortega, and Jaime Wheelock

[33] Ernesto "Che" Guevara, *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolution*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968); Gabriella Paolucci, "Sartre's Humanism and the Cuban Revolution," *Theory and Society* 36 (2007).

[34] Fred Judson, "Sandinista Revolutionary Morale," *Latin American Perspectives*, (1987): 19-42.

initial programs.[35] Although Ana Lorenzo's study of Cuba and Ulrike Hanemann reports on Nicaragua provide objective analytical data regarding both programs, the report authored in Cuba and later published by UNESCO primarily concerning the countryside carries a distinct ideological slant favoring the Cuban government's actions to address illiteracy.[36] Working within the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education, Juan B. Arrién's assessment of educational endeavors undertaken in Nicaragua during the 1980s provides a more objective view of the country's efforts, unlike the Cuban report, despite the heavily charged political atmosphere in which Arrién published his report.[37] Sympathetic views toward the ruling governments characterized the internal reports published by Cuba and Nicaragua, but the Lorenzo and Hanemann reports authored for UNESCO supplement and validate the figures presented in the more biased internal reports.

Understanding the United States' foreign policy during the Cold Was is particularly crucial as this policy directly affected both Cuba and Nicaragua's abilities to carry out their literacy or subsequent follow-up educational measures. John Lewis Gaddis and John Hammond's assessments of security policy during the Cold War provide an overview of American foreign policy during the time in which Cuba and Nicaragua conducted their programs.[38] Classified as a "post-revisionist," Gaddis's writing concerning the Cold War does take into account the restrictions on US policy makers

---

[35] Ana Lorenza, "Report on Method and Means Utilized in Cuba to Eliminate Illiteracy." UNESCO, (1969);" Ulrike Hanemann, "Nicaragua's Literacy Campaign" (Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Education, 2005);

[36] Max Figueroa, Abel Prieto, and Raúl Gutiérrez, "The basic secondary school in the country: an educational innovation in Cuba," (Paris: The UNESCO Press, 1974).

[37] Juan B. Arríen, *Nicaragua: Diez años de educación en la revolución: contexto, advances, problemas y un proceso de transformación*, (Nicaraguan Ministry of Education, 1989).

[38] John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); John Hammond, *Cold War and Détente: The American Foreign Policy Process Since 1945*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1975)

during this period due to pressing domestic concerns. With regard to Latin America, however, Gaddis downplays the impact of foreign policy on the region as well as the direct involvement of the United States in Latin America during this period. Hammond's work, like Gaddis, focuses on the US-origins of Cold War policy and devotes little space to a discussion about the implementation or outcomes of these policy initiatives in other countries, specifically Latin America. Consequently, the US-centric focus of both Gaddis and Hammond limits the utility of these works in this research, although they did give insight and information about the policies themselves.

Not unlike Thomas Walker's Nicaraguan historical narrative, Jesús Arboleya's investigation of the various counterrevolutionary forces at work within Cuba assigns a great deal of responsibility to the United States for the various anti-Castro efforts formulated or carried out in Cuba in the last half century.[39] With regard to internal dissent, Castro effectively eliminated or suppressed most internal sources of dissent within the country, which justifies Arboleya's downplaying of the role of these groups or individuals. The same, however, is not true for Nicaragua as the Sandinistas contended with considerable internal and external sources of dissent, something little mentioned in Walker's narrative. Michael Erisman's *Cuba's International Relations: The Anatomy of a Nationalistic Foreign Policy* gives a basic understanding of the nationalistic focus and aims that have traditionally driven Cuban foreign policy.[40] The nationalistic tendencies of Cuba are especially crucial to understanding this period as these motivations not only encouraged Cuban leaders to develop a literacy program initially, but they greatly

---

[39] Jésus Arboleya, The Cuban Counter-Revolution, Translated by Rafael Betancourt, (Center for International Studies at Ohio University, 2000).
[40] Michael H. Erisman, *Cuba's International Relations: The Anatomy of a Nationalistic Foreign Policy*, (Boulder: Westview, 1985).

influenced the materials used in the program and inspired many to participate as volunteers. Edited by Cole Blasier and Carmelo Mesa-Lago, *Cuba in the World* provides perhaps the most interesting perspective regarding Cuba's international relations.[41]

Gary Prevost's article, "Cuba and Nicaragua: A Special Relationship?" provides both a concise overview of the relationship between the two countries and introduces the ideas central to Sandinista foreign policy, most notably their "diversified dependency" plan.[42] Robert Pastor's *Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua* offers a more in-depth understanding of Nicaraguan foreign policy, although , like Walker and George and Bevan, considers the United States or Somoza culpable for most of the difficulties the Sandinistas encountered in establishing and maintaining of ties with other countries to [43] Pastor, however, provides a more expansive view of Nicaraguan policy issues by exploring the various political factions within Nicaragua openly working against the Sandinistas and contradicting or preempting the work of the FSLN from within the party itself.

The pedagogical implications of both the Cuban and Nicaraguan literacy programs merit considerable attention as the programs in each country not only altered teaching methods, studies, and foci in the countries themselves, but they influenced and contributed to a greater shift in educational thought. Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, published in 1965, best represents this larger shift in pedagogical method and theory. Both programs substantiate the claims Freire asserts in the work, specifically his

---

[41] Cole Blasier and Carmelo Mesa-Lago, editors, *Cuba in the World*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979).
[42] Prevost, Gary. "Cuba and Nicaragua: A Special Relationship?" *Latin American Perspectives* 17 (1990): 120-137.
[43] Robert Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua*,. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

insistence on discussion-based learning and the use of "generative vocabulary" in adult literacy programs.[44] Although some draw upon the relationship between Freire's work and the experiences in Cuba and Nicaragua, this research draws a more distinct relationship between the theorist and these programs as he had first-hand experience in both countries—in Cuba following the campaign and as an educational advisor in Nicaragua in 1979—which to some degree influenced his views regarding educational theory.

Freire's *Education for Critical Consciousness* expounds upon the ideas he asserts in his earlier *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and explains in greater detail the *political* necessity of literacy, particularly in countries in political transition.[45] Andrew Kirkendall's *Paulo Freire & the Cold War Politics of Literacy* reasserts this political significance of the work of Paulo Freire himself and other revolutionary literacy movements across Latin America and describes both Freire's collaboration with the World Council of Churches, a leading donor to the Nicaraguan program, and planners of the Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade.[46] Both Freire and Kirkendall provide valid reasoning to justify each revolutionary government's want to pursue widespread literacy to promote their political ends; however, Kirkendall's examination of Nicaragua in particular does highlight shortcomings of Sandinista leadership in conducting the campaign, a program Freire himself remained entirely supportive.

---

[44] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary Edition*. Translated by Myra Berman Ramos. (New York: Continuum, 2006).
[45] Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, Translated by the Center for the Study of Development and Social Change, (New York: Continuum, 1974).
[46] Andrew J. Kirkendall, *Paulo Freire & the Cold War Politics of Literacy*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

Given the limited amount of in-depth scholarship assessing either the 1961 Cuban Campaign or the 1980 Nicaraguan Crusade, a considerable amount of work remains to fully examine and therefore understand these programs. The addition of more literature on both the Cuban and Nicaraguan programs not only contributes to a wider understanding of each country's historical narrative, but also explains how each program impacted or influenced events internationally. This research attempts to provide a wider perspective of the programs through a comparison of the experiences in Cuba and Nicaragua and shed light onto how and why these programs succeeded or failed outside of the structure and composition of the programs themselves.

Origins and Implementation of Programs

For Cuban and Nicaraguan leaders, a plenitude of factors, including promotion of revolutionary ideals, reduction of income inequality, and the integration of members from differing social or economic classes motivated the promotion of literacy. Leaders in both Cuba and Nicaragua believed having a literate population was essential to the implementation of subsequent revolutionary measures, programs, and initiatives. By implementing literacy programs along with other social initiatives at the outset of their revolutionary rises to power, Castro and the Sandinistas actively pursued means to attain higher levels of literacy in their countries.

The idea of creating a "new man" motivated revolutionary leaders in Cuba and Nicaragua, and they used it in their rhetoric promoting the literacy campaigns. The French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, a visitor to the island in 1960, commended Cuban Revolutionary leaders in replying "to the material needs and the construction of the 'new

man'" in their various endeavors-- including the literacy campaign.[47] Educational theorist Paolo Freire also noted the importance of the "new man" to forward the cause for literacy at the UNESCO conference in Persepolis, Iran, in 1975, as well as during his stint in Nicaragua as an educational advisor.[48]

Castro consistently presented widespread literacy and availability to free education were two elements essential to the success of any successful revolutionary movement in Cuba. Castro reflected his dedication to promoting the importance of widespread literacy and access to free education in numerous speeches and published writings. From speeches given as early as 1953, Castro and others within his cadre of revolutionaries touted the importance of education as the "only basis for human dignity and for the country's social development."[49] While still stationed in the rural mountains of eastern Cuba, Castro's guerrilla forces released the "Manifesto of the Sierra Maestra." The manifesto made the first specific mention of a literacy campaign to combat illiteracy in the country.[50] Castro's 1960 "First Declaration of Havana" promoted the importance of free education for all Cuban children as a social right and a feature that would lead to the liberation of the Cuban people from all forms of oppression.[51]

Cuban and Nicaraguan leaders believed literacy would free their people from one particular form of oppression: *Yanqui Imperialism.* In a speech to a delegation of the United Nations in September of 1960, Castro not only announced the plan "to become the first country in America... to say it does not have one single illiterate" though a country-

---

[47] Theodore MacDonald 18. Gabriella Paolucci, "Sarte's humanism and the Cuban Revolution" *Theory and Society* 36 (2007): 248-249.
[48] Valerie Miller 10-11.
[49] MacDonald 18.
[50] Marvin Leiner 173.
[51] Fidel Castro, "First Declaration of Havana."

wide literacy campaign, but also devoted considerable time in his speech detailing Cuba's experience beneath the weight of the imperialistic United States, particularly through the provisions of the repressive Platt Amendment.[52] Castro justified the Cuban Revolution as one that liberated the Cuban people from the yoke of American imperialism. He further implied that this same anti-imperialist sentiment influenced the development of the literacy campaign to be conducted in the upcoming year. The Sandinistas, much like Castro, focused on the restrictive nature of imperialism and its role in retarding growth in the country. Throughout the rhetoric of the FSLN, Sandinista leaders referenced the "imperialist" actions of the United States, and like Cuba, incorporated this same anti-imperialist thought into the message concerning the literacy campaign.[53]

Much like Castro's cadre, the rhetoric Sandinista leaders used in Nicaragua emphasized the importance of education and literacy for all Nicaraguans. The Sandinistas closely connected education and literacy with human dignity, albeit with a more dogmatic slant than Cuba. To a great extent, leaders in Nicaragua portrayed Sandinismo and Christianity as "two complementary aspects of Nicaraguan life," and this message certainly did not escape the Literacy Crusade.[54] In addition to the religious slant of rhetoric used to promote the literacy crusade, the Sandinistas also greatly emphasized the political aspect of literacy. Drawing upon the Aristotelian definition of "politics" as working toward greater good, Nicaraguan leader Fernando Cardenal emphasized the central role of literacy and education in the pursuance of this "greater good" through

---

[52] Fidel Castro, "The Problem of Cuba and its Revolutionary Policy."
[53] Tomás Borges, Carlos Fonesca, Daniel Ortega, Humberto Ortega, and Jaime Wheelock 26-29.
[54] Donald C. Hodges 262.

politics.[55] Though Nicaraguan leaders used decidedly more religious symbolism in their ideas and platforms, the rhetoric used in Nicaragua to promote literacy incorporated elements of nationalist ideals central to Cuban thought.

Although presumably carried out to address illiteracy in both countries, the possible social and political implications certainly motivated the creation and implementation of these plans. In the words of Cuban educator, Dr. Mier Febles, "the goal of the campaign was always greater than to teach poor people how to read. The dream was to enable those two portions of the population... to find a common bond, a common spirit, and a common goal."[56] Most alfabetizadores, advisors, and other volunteers came from middle and upper class, urban backgrounds. Leaders in Cuba and then in Nicaragua hoped literacy programs in sharing a common goal of reducing illiteracy, would better integrate citizens from different economic and social backgrounds into one social body that would be supportive of the revolutionary leaders while reducing illiteracy.

Like the earlier Cuban campaign, organizers of the Nicaraguan National Literacy Crusade hoped to maintain and gather new support for the Sandinista-led Nicaraguan government through a country-wide literacy program. Nicaraguan leaders found the country in a dire financial situation following the removal of Somoza. Economic hardships prevented the new leaders from making any substantial efforts to immediately raise the standard of living for impoverished Nicaraguans, the majority of whom supported the FSLN. [57] The Sandinista-led government hoped the literacy campaign

---

[55] Miller 25-26.
[56] Kozol 22.
[57] Jan L. Flora, John McFadden, and Ruth Warner 46.

would serve as a way to ensure continued support of the revolution as they attempted to consolidate power across the country. Not only did the goal of preserving of existing support drive Nicaraguan leaders to begin this intensive and country-wide effort to combat illiteracy, but the possibility of gaining middle-class support for their government through participation in the program as teachers or young brigadistas motivated the Nicaraguan effort, as noted by Jan Flora, John McFadden and Ruth Warner in their study of the crusade.[58]

With a central place within the rhetoric of revolutionary forces in both Cuba and Nicaragua, preparations for the implementation of these oft-mentioned literacy programs began almost immediately after each revolutionary group took power. To prepare for these programs, leaders in both countries studied previously designed or implemented literacy programs, conducted census counts to locate illiterate populations as well as developed the bureaucratic structure to organize and run each program.

Preparation for the Cuban Literacy Campaign began in full following Comandante Castro's address to the United Nations on September 26, 1960, although some work related to the program had already been done on a small, experimental scale before Castro's official pronouncement.[59] Prior to the speech, members of the Literacy and Basic Education Commission had hosted training programs for voluntary teachers on techniques related to adult literacy. During these programs, the Commission examined various methods used to teach people how to read including "the ideophonic method of Ana Echegoyen, the normal words method of Maria L. Soler and the Laubach method."[60]

---

[58] Flora, McFadden, and Warner 47.
[59] Ana Lorenza 21.
[60] Lorenza 17.

Although the commission initially decided to use a combination of the Echegoyen and Laubach methods in the upcoming literacy campaign, they eventually abandoned these methods at the behest of Dr. Raúl Gutiérrez, the Cuban Minister of Education, who stated that "though technically good, [they] did not adapt themselves to the specific motivation of the moment, of the country and of the struggle against illiteracy."[61] For the campaign itself, Gutiérrez and the commission instead developed a program that implemented the "active and passive vocabulary of the Cuban farmer."[62] As these terms had a greater social and cultural importance, the commission and especially Director Gutiérrez believed the use of what Brazilian pedagogical theorist Paolo Freire would later deem "generative terms" would better motivate those learning to read. Freire contended that to attain substantial gains through adult literacy programs organizers, teachers, and volunteers should utilized words "generated" from the working vocabulary of the participant in the program itself rather than the rote memorization promoted by earlier methods—most notably the Laubach method. Although developed prior to Freire's promotion of "generative" words in adult literacy programs, the Cuban program closely modeled his work in rural Brazil in 1964.[63] Nicaragua also developed and utilized a program similar to that of Cuba and Freire, with the added benefit of hosting advisors from Cuba as well as Freire himself during the planning stages of their Literacy Crusade.[64]

In Nicaragua, preparation began in August 1979, following the appointment of Father Fernando Cardenal as the National Coordinator. Cardenal alongside delegates

---

[61] Lorenza 18.
[62] Lorenza 22.
[63] Kozol 18-19.
[64] Miller

Inaccurate in both countries, census records concerning rates of illiteracy did not even exist for most of the country of Nicaragua. Therefore, both countries conducted a volunteer-led census to collect data on illiteracy. In 1960 and 1961, Cubans-- generally members of groups such as the women's federation, trade unions, and the farmworkers federation-- traversed the country collecting information. Their records indicated that 979,000 illiterate people lived in Cuba, and the majority (67%) resided in rural areas, especially in Oriente province.[70] In Nicaragua, volunteers carried out the census in a remarkable two-week period in October 1979.[71] After compiling the results from the census, the information gathered confirmed the image of the country as one suffering from "pronounced regional imbalances, reflecting the distorted model of economic development under the dictatorship" with lower rates of illiteracy in more urbanized areas like Managua or the Pacific coast belt (as low as 26.5%) and rural illiteracy rates reaching 85% in some of the most remote regions.[72]

Although non-governmental entities like teachers unions or the church certainly contributed to efforts to lower literacy, the Cuban and Nicaraguan governments initiated and led their respective literacy programs. In Cuba, Dr. Raúl Gutiérrez directed the Cuban Literacy Campaign indirectly as the Minister of Education and Director of the National Literacy commission, known at the time as the National Literacy and Basic Education Commission.[73] Likewise in Nicaragua, the Literacy Crusade fell beneath the direction a National Coordinating Committee within the Ministry of Education and under the direct leadership of Father Fernando Cardenal, the brother of author and fellow priest

---

[70] Leiner 176.
[71] Hanemann 3.
[72] Black and Bevan 50.
[73] Lorenza 22

Ernesto Cardenal.[74] With the centralization of efforts related to the development and implementation of literacy programs below one singular institution within the government, each program benefited from a relatively stable and unified chain of command during the developmental stages. According to Valerie Miller, however, this centralized bureaucratic structure proved to be cumbersome and therefore somewhat of an impediment to workers once the work began in Nicaragua.[75]

Cuba and Nicaragua utilized slightly different time frames to conduct their respective literacy programs. Divided into three main parts, the Cuban Campaign began on January 1, 1961, with the organization of the technical and organizational structure. Cuban volunteer literacy workers trained for five weeks at Varadero, a former luxury resort recently nationalized by Castro's government. The second stage lasted from May to September and consisted of a mass mobilization of the voluntary teaching forces to begin their work against illiteracy, and the final stage lasted until mid-December representing the "final push" of the year-long movement.[76]

Organized on a much shorter time frame, the Nicaraguan National Literacy Crusade began the year following the defeat of Somoza and the National Guard. The Sandinista-led government designated 1980 as the "Year of Literacy," and planning for the program began almost immediately after the removal of Somoza. The planning period lasted from August 1979, until the start of the program in March. During the first stage of the Nicaraguan Crusade starting in March 1980, young volunteers underwent intensive training in teaching methodology. The 1980 Crusade officially began on March 24, 1980,

---

[74] Black and Bevan 48.
[75] Miller
[76] Lorenza 21

with the mass deployment of literacy workers into the various departments targeted by the literacy program and ending on August 15th of the same year.

The successful implementation of a literacy campaign relied primarily on the work of volunteers for teaching as well as advisory work in both countries. Leaders in both countries realized the dire need for thousands of people to reach the widespread illiterate populations, especially in rural areas, and extensive recruitment campaigns immediately preceded each literacy movement. Although program organizers targeted teachers to participate as instructors and educational advisors, students who had completed at least a secondary level education made up the largest segment of the population working as part of these campaigns. With a minimum age of 12 established for the brigadistas, most of those participating in the Cuban and Nicaraguan effort fell within the age range 12-24, with most aged 14-16.[77] To officially join the ranks of the volunteer educators, teens in both countries submitted a permission signed by a parent or guardian as evidence of their consent.

Naturally, many parents hesitated before automatically allowing their children to leave for the literacy training programs, and students often found themselves having to convince their parents. Some, like the Cuban brigadistas interviewed by Jonathan Kozol, even threatened to forge the signature and leave anyway. Middle class parents, especially those of teenage girls, represented the group most recalcitrant to grant permission to join the campaign efforts. To sway the opinions of these suspicious parents, organizers in

---

[77] Leiner 177.

Cuba and Nicaragua organized volunteers in single sex groups, with males and females also residing in separate housing during the length of their training.[78]

Shortages of qualified teachers most significantly contributed to the lack of educational opportunities, especially in rural areas with the highest recorded levels of illiteracy. Through the recruitment process, organizers in both countries hoped to lessen the effects of this issue. In both countries, teachers, often raised and educated in urban areas, demonstrated reluctance in leaving urban areas for rural teaching assignments. In Cuba, for example, teachers-- predominately women—often came from upper middle class to wealthy families and frequently paid a surrogate to teach if assigned to a rural area.[79] By recruiting younger segments of the population to work in the campaign, planners in Cuba and Nicaragua hoped, at least to some degree, the novelty of leaving home for the first time would sway many to not only join the program, but to agree to serve in the traditionally underserved rural or mountainous regions.

After joining each program, literacy workers underwent an intensive, short-term training that included learning teaching techniques as well as familiarization with the teaching material, developed specially for each individual program. Training not only helped to acclimate "teachers" who were by and large teenagers to their new positions, but it also uniformly presented material and techniques. This uniformity in preparation addressed one of the major problems common to Latin American public education systems identified by George Black and John Bevan. In Black and Bevan's examination of the state of post-Somoza Nicaraguan education, they noted the detrimental impact of

---

[78] Black and Bevan 54.
[79] MacDonald 38.

the lack of standardization, particularly in the training of primary school teachers.[80] Weekly sessions held either on Saturday or Sunday supplemented the uniform initial training session that took place prior to the official start of the literacy programs in Nicaragua and Cuba. These sessions allowed brigadistas to meet with regional advisors to discuss progress of students, issues, introduce new teaching techniques, and discuss any problems or difficulties encountered during the previous week.

Cuban literacy workers trained for an average of five weeks at Varadero learned pedagogical techniques and how to adapt to living in "largely unelectrified and unfamiliar rural areas."[81] As most Cuban brigadistas came from the more urbanized areas in or around Havana, planners emphasized the importance of adaptation to the "campesino" lifestyle. Giving Coleman lanterns to each of the Cuban volunteers evidenced this focus on adaptation during training as brigadistas would likely have no other source of light for their lessons after working all day with the family.[82]

In Nicaragua, the training of literacy workers depended primarily on the success of a multiplier effect. First, a group of eighty from the Patria Libre brigade received two weeks of intensive pedagogical and practical training in teaching Spanish literacy. This initial group then bore the responsibility of training another 560, and that group another 7,000.[83] Finally, the entire group of trained volunteers underwent a two-week program in March prior to the official start of the program on March 24. As many of the Nicaraguan volunteers came from the cities of Managua, Grenada, Leon, and along the Pacific coast,

---

[80] Black and Bevan 22.
[81] Kozol 20.
[82] Kozol 35.
[83] Black and Bevan 51.

acclimation to living in the mountainous and relatively inhospitable countryside proved essential to training for their Literacy Crusade like the earlier Cuban training program.

In addition to the more standardized teaching techniques promoted during the training for literacy workers in Cuba and Nicaragua, the providing of standardized teaching materials also contributed to the effectiveness of workers in both programs. In Cuba, planners armed brigadistas with a teacher's manual titled *Alfabeticemos* (We learn how to read) and a primer named *Venceremos* (We shall overcome).[84] The basis of the Nicaraguan teaching materials included twenty-three lessons compiled in a book titled *El amanacer del pueblo* (The Sunrise of the People) as part of the greater set of learning and teaching materials titled the *Cuaderno de educación sandinista de lecto-escritura.*[85] Developed just prior to the start of each program, the teaching materials used in both Cuba and Nicaragua mirrored one another not only in structure but also in theme.

During the development of the primers, educators in both countries sought to incorporate images, vocabulary, and situations common to those targeted by the campaign in an effort to better engage them in the material and to overcome the psychological barriers that are especially prevalent in adults who are illiterate.[86] In addition to the incorporation of these "generative terms," developers in both countries incorporated a distinctly political message throughout the lessons included in the student primer.[87] For example, Cuban organizers entitled the first lesson in the Cuban *Venceremos* "OEA" and although intended to introduce vowel sounds, creators of the program also meant for the lesson to share a political message. "OEA" stood for the

---

[84] Kozol 12-13.
[85] Black and Bevan 64.
[86] MacDonald 57.
[87] MacDonald 66-67.

Organización de Estados Americanos (Organization of American States- OAS), an organization United States had recently excluded Cuba from in an effort to isolate the country and thus weaken Castro's hold on power. Political elements also made their way into the Nicaraguan primer with the first lesson, also focused on vowel sounds, centered on Nicaraguan nationalist idol Augusto Sandino.[88]

The structuring of the lessons proved to be one of the most successful elements of both countries' literacy programs. Oral practice and discussion prompted by an image or short story introduced new material and more structured written material then followed.[89] For both the Cuban and Nicaraguan literacy programs, the literacy worked showed the illiterate student a photograph to elicit conversation, and thus begin oral practice in Spanish before starting on the written portion of the lesson.[90] In structuring lessons around conversation between the literacy worker and the participant, organizers of both programs hoped to avoid the "condescending manner" of teachers in many public schools but at the same time provide a relatively structured learning environment given the brief time frame of both literacy programs.[91]

One of the most central elements to both programs consisted of the administration of assessments to measure the progress of learners participating in the literacy programs in Cuba and Nicaragua. Both countries utilized three assessments to measure the progress of those participating in the literacy initiatives. In addition to the number of tests given, the material on the exams in each country also reflected one another in terms of theme as

---

[88] Hirshon and Butler 51-53.
[89] Black and Bevan 65.
[90] Black and Bevan 64.
[91] Kozol 14-15.

the tests, like the primers themselves, often had a decidedly political slant or socio-cultural significance specific to the country.

Before starting their lessons with a new student, Cuban literacy workers filled out a questionnaire with the new, non-literate pupil about the person's educational background and work or career information to get a better understanding of the learner's current abilities with regard to reading and writing.[92] Throughout the time with learners, literacy workers administered three tests to measure progress, with the final test administered after the completion of the primer. By the completion of the Cuban program, students composed a letter to Castro detailing their recently attained literate state.

Throughout the five months of the National Literacy Crusade, volunteers also kept records to track the progress of those involved in the program. These records not only included journal entries kept by brigadistas or alfabetizadores themselves about their experiences but also three tests administered to those involved in the program to mark their progress. Given at the outset of the program, the first test measured the initial skill level of the individual participating in the literacy program. It began with an exercise that required the participant to draw a straight line, followed by some reading and writing exercises, and finally a section to test reading comprehension.[93] After finishing half of the primer, the participant took a second test to assess progress and identify any individual study needs. At the conclusion of the program, the participant took the third and final exam under the guidance of a technical advisor to assess the participant's degree of literacy. The final exam included sections testing reading, writing and comprehension

---

[92] Kozol 51.
[93] Hanemann 7.

skills through reading a short passage aloud, composing a short essay, writing his or her name, and answering questions related to a reading.[94]

The close of the Cuban and Nicaraguan literacy campaigns revealed notable, positive results of each country's efforts. In Cuba, illiteracy fell from a reported 23.9% to approximately 3%.[95] Nicaragua's intensive, five-month efforts resulted in a reduction of illiteracy from 50.3% to 12.9%.[96] Even though some contest the specific figures presented by both countries regarding illiteracy both prior to and following each literacy initiative, each program did result in a significant reduction of Spanish-language illiteracy across both countries, particularly in the traditionally-underserved rural areas.

In Cuba, members of the National Literacy Commission as well as others within the Cuban government viewed the Literacy Campaign of 1961 as a springboard for further educational developments.[97] Entitled the *Seguimiento* (Follow-Up), Cuban leaders developed this program as a way to ensure the preservation of the gains made during the 1961 Literacy Campaign, and concede that the achievements of that initial effort "would have been of lasting value, in purely pedagogic terms, had it not been for the Follow-Up."[98]

Nicaragua, too, viewed the Literacy Crusade as the crucial first step toward achieving the other educational goals listed within the "Historic Program of the FSLN," a document published initially in 1969 and reprinted in June 1981 by the Department of Propaganda and Political Education.[99] Following the first push to eliminate Spanish

---

[94] Hanemann 7.
[95] Lorenza
[96] Hanemann 2.
[97] MacDonald 17.
[98] Kozol 56.
[99] Tomás Borges, Carlos Fonesca, Daniel Ortega, Humberto Ortega, and Jaime Wheelock 16-17.

illiteracy during the five-month National Literacy Crusade, the National Coordinating Committee embarked on a transitional program to shift from the literacy program to permanent courses in adult education to preserve gains attained during the campaign. The implementation of follow-up programs in Nicaragua included an added benefit as it allowed many former students to serve as regional "coordinators" to help others practice skills they themselves mastered during the crusade itself.[100] In addition to the transitional program, the Coordinating Committee also organized efforts to address illiteracy in other languages spoken in Nicaragua, primarily English.[101]

Although leaders in Cuba and Nicaragua considered literacy a crucial element not only to their political success but also the economic and social success of the people in both countries, neither group considered its short-term literacy initiative as independent from a wider program dedicated to continued educational advancement. Following the conclusion of their respective programs, leaders in each country embarked on subsequent measures to ensure and to preserve the gains made during the nationwide literacy programs. The pursuit and implementation of these measures varied considerably from Cuba to Nicaragua, and several internal as well as external factors greatly affected the eventual results of the programs conducted in each country to eradicate illiteracy.

Internal Variables

Despite the similarities in structure and implementation of the literacy programs in Cuba and Nicaragua, several internal variables impacted the efficacy of the work done by literacy volunteers in each country. As continuing education proved to be the key to sustaining gains made during each campaign, officials in Cuba and Nicaragua attempted

---

[100] Miller 196-197.
[101] Black and Bevan 55.

to bridge the gap between the short-term literacy campaign and a long-term plan to eliminate or greatly reduce illiteracy. Several internal variables affected the feasibility of these efforts, with the most influential of these variables being infrastructure. Roads, schools, and the availability of running water and electricity, influenced each program the most. The financial state of each country both prior to and during the carrying out of each program, the timing of the programs, linguistic concerns addressed in Nicaragua, the role of religion or religious organizations, as well as the personalistic appeal of leaders supporting the Cuban program also differed between programs in Cuba and Nicaragua. [102]

Timing of the literacy programs in the revolutionary context

Occurring nearly two years after the 1959 overthrow of Batista, 1961 Cuban Literacy Campaign enjoyed certain benefits due to the timing of the endeavor. During those two years, many opponents to Castro and his socialist-structured government left the island and chose to make the ninety mile trip to the United States. After the failed invasion at the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban government imprisoned those who remained on the island in opposition to Castro and the government, and governmental dissidents continued to flee the island. Cuba's success at the Bay of Pigs reinvigorated the revolutionary spirit of Castro's supporters and eliminated dissenters who could have posed a threat to those planning, volunteering, or participating in the Literacy Campaign. The later start of the Cuban program also afforded Castro and others working in the government greater time to acclimate themselves to the functioning of the government itself.

---

[102]By timing, I am referring to the distance in time from each country's revolution to the beginning of their literacy program.

The timing of the 1980 Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade offered some benefits, but certainly some disadvantages as well. Because planners began organizing the Nicaraguan literacy program almost immediately after the defeat of Somoza and the National Guard, the revolutionary fervor reverberating throughout the country benefitted organizers and volunteers in the Nicaraguan Crusade. Young Nicaraguans, many of whom had participated in the revolution itself. This excitement proved to be instrumental in the recruiting of young Nicaraguans to work for the program as many had participated in the revolution itself and hoped to keep its spirit alive through participation in the Crusade. The early start, however, did disadvantage the Nicaraguan organizers to some extent though as inexperience in governing and haste to begin the program led to many issues noted by observers or participants in the program. Also, in using such an abbreviated time frame, the Sandinistas did not consolidate power politically, leaving themselves vulnerable to attacks from dissent groups still actively working within the country.

The relationship between geography and infrastructure

The geographic and climactic makeup of each country most influenced the availability or existence of infrastructure in Cuba and Nicaragua. With the majority of illiterate populations residing in the rural areas of both countries, Nicaraguan and Cuban brigadistas endured precarious and unwelcoming weather conditions to reach their assigned destinations. Geographic features did serve, to some degree, as a hindrance to literacy workers' efforts. The timing of the Cuban and Nicaraguan campaigns and the adaptive efforts of the workers themselves to better acclimate to conditions lessened the negative impact of geography on each program. Though the geographic and climactic makeup of each country hindered the work of literacy workers, the existence or workable

state of infrastructure in the countries prior to the start of the programs more greatly impacted the efforts of those working in Cuba and Nicaragua.

Cuba

Situated within the mild waters of the Caribbean Ocean, the island nation of Cuba is located approximately ninety miles south of the Florida peninsula. Cuba's geographical location motivated many colonial powers and later the United States to seek to control this crucial landmass. A Spanish colony until 1898, the Spanish crown used the island colony as a gatekeeper for regional trade.[103] One major chain of mountains (the Sierra Maestra) covers the eastern half of this tropical island. Aside from this grouping of mountains, the topographical layout of Cuba consists primarily of rolling hills and coastal plain regions near the shorelines. As the Caribbean's gatekeeper, Cuba remains susceptible to hurricanes and tropical storms, but it does not have to contend with the earthquakes or volcanoes that frequently affect Nicaragua.

Once considered the "Crown Jewel of the Caribbean," Spain counted Cuba as its most profitable colony. As such, Spanish colonials constructed a relatively extensive set of roadways on the island. Although roads in rural areas ranged from slight disrepair to dirt paths, cities like Havana enjoyed well-paved and planned street systems for the most part. The brevity and less violent nature of the Cuban Revolution preserved much of the infrastructure in existence under Batista, a stark contrast to the much more destructive Nicaraguan Revolution.

---

[103]D.S. Whittlesey, "Geographic Factors in the Relations of the United States and Cuba," *Geographical Review* 12 (1922): 241-242.

A complete lack of schools in rural areas confined the availability of primary and secondary schooling to those residing in urbanized areas before the revolution in Cuba.[104] Few educational facilities existed outside of expensive boarding schools in rural Cuba. Therefore, Cubans living in rural areas had extremely limited educational opportunities. In addition to a general lack of educational facilities, the cost of attendance also prevented many Cubans from attaining any amount of education, as private schools in rural regions were relatively costly. If a rural school actually existed, under-trained or under-educated teachers often filled the classrooms. Absenteeism among teachers plagued most rural schools, since teachers assigned to rural postings frequently paid less-educated surrogates to teach in their places while "the teacher holidayed in Miami."[105]

The Cuban government's massive reinvestment in infrastructure certainly benefitted the Cuban program both during the campaign and in subsequent years, particularly regarding the building of schools. In 1961, the Cuban government constructed over 3000 schools, around 300,000 Cuban children attended school for the first time, and the pool of available, trained educators expanded by about 7000.[106] Throughout the program and after the official conclusion of the Cuban Literacy Campaign, the Cuban government rebuilt roads and schools across the country, allowing for exponential expansion in the availability of free primary, secondary, and university education.

Cuban schools benefited government initiatives to eliminate illiteracy in providing a space both to conduct the *Seguimiento* and to introduce new, more

---

[104] MacDonald 38.
[105] MacDonald 38.
[106] Richard Gott 189.

technically focused teaching materials as part of a larger change in Cuban education. The shift in education quickly led to a shift in the professional demographics of the island. Prior to the revolution and subsequent literacy campaign, "there was no systematic or conscious link between national economic or social needs and the work of the university."[107] In designing the program and the subsequent measures comprising the *Seguimiento*, Cuban leaders noted the need for more technically trained workers to attain any degree of sustainable economic growth and designed the program and the new educational institutions to reflect this reality.[108]

The positive effect of the cult of personality surrounding Cuban leaders such as Fidel Castro and Ernesto "Che" Guevara distinguished the Cuban experience from previous and subsequent literacy programs. Even from the Moncada attacks in 1953, Cubans held Castro in high regard and considered him "the outstanding figure of his generation."[109] After assuming power in 1959, Castro made himself a "ubiquitous presence" through Cuba's radio and television systems and in-person by delivering speeches nearly constantly.[110] Within months, Cubans, brimming with revolutionary fervor began clamoring for change to the political, social, and economic system in the country, and the charismatic Castro urged them forward. As one of the most adamant supporters of the literacy campaign, Castro used his post-revolutionary popularity to garner support for the program. He substantiated this support once the campaign started

---

[107] MacDonald 161.
[108] MacDonald 109.
[109] Gott 147.
[110] Louis A. Pérez Jr. 315.

and made himself an active presence at the training site at Varadero and subsequent events related to the 1961 Literacy Campaign.[111]

Ernesto Guevara, known more affectionately as Che, is yet another figure active in the revolutionary Cuban government who brought much attention and support for the Literacy Campaign in Cuba. A former medical school student from Argentina, Che's slightly mysterious character captured the minds of many Cubans during his time in the country. As one of Castro's closest associates, Che exemplified his dedication to the revolution and to the teaching of literacy early, evidenced in his mentions of teaching other guerrillas how to read during their time stationed in the Sierra Maestras.[112] Like Castro, Guevara often mentioned the importance of literacy to the revolution and in the formation of a "new man" who lived independent from all forms of oppression--economic, intellectual, political, or diplomatic. The Cuban fascination with Guevara only intensified following his death in Bolivia, and he remained a figure that Cuban school children often mentioned and romanticized, showing the longevity of his legacy on the island as noted by MacDonald.[113]

Unlike Nicaragua and many other Latin American nations, the Catholic Church did not possess considerable sway in Cuban culture and affected its literacy campaign only nominally. The small number of priests on the island limited the influence of the Church, as slightly more than 700 priests served Cuba's population of nearly 3 million.[114] Not only did the number of priests contribute to the lack of influence on the island, but the concentration of Catholic churches in urban areas by primarily Spanish-born priests

---

[111] Kozol 25.
[112] Ernesto "Che" Guevara, *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968): 71.
[113] MacDonald 183-184.
[114] Louis A. Pérez Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 334.

also distanced the church from the cultural mindset of many people in the country, particularly those residing in rural areas. Furthermore, a majority of the former parishioners of the Cuban Catholic church emigrated to the United States or other countries before or shortly after Batista's removal from power. Even though members of the Church participated in the Literacy Campaign, the support of the Church proved more vital to the carrying out of the later Nicaraguan effort.

Nicaragua

Nicaragua varies greatly both geographically and climactically. Centrally located on the landmass connecting North and South America, the country of Nicaragua is the largest country by area in Central America and rests between the countries of Honduras and Costa Rica.[115] Mountainous regions divide the country and serve to define the regions climatologically as well as physically. With mountains (Las Segovias) running north to south near the Pacific coastline, along the Honduran border, as well as a strand of active volcanoes along the eastern shore of Lake Managua, the geography of Nicaragua divides the country's population into three main groups.[116] For the most part, Nicaraguans reside in settlements in western Nicaragua nestled between the Pacific Ocean and the Segovias, in the three main cities, León, Managua, and Grenada, in the central highlands, or in the jungle and river-filled eastern portion of the country in sparsely populated groups.

Another pertinent aspect of Nicaraguan geography includes the climatic makeup of the Central American nation. Nicaragua experiences two primary seasons with the precipitation-filled winter months considered the wet or rainy season and the summer

---

[115] Thomas W. Walker 1.
[116] Hirshon and Butler 17.

months much drier. Although the climate varies regionally, with the inner highlands experiencing less humidity overall as compared to the marshy Atlantic region, the seasonal distinctions remain relatively constant across the country. During the wet season, Nicaragua experiences nearly constant rains, a prevalence of mudslides, high humidity and relatively temperate temperatures; however, in the summer, the humidity dissipates and temperatures range in the mid-eighties to nineties.

In addition to the geographic and climatic features that limit the amount of infrastructure in Nicaragua, the prevalence of natural disasters contributed to the lack of infrastructure within the country. The 1972 earthquake wrought extensive damage to the country and caused extensive infrastructural damage to buildings and roads throughout the country. For the most part, the Nicaraguan government failed to address or improve a majority of these issues, and Somoza's mishandling of relief efforts even helped to unite disparate groups against the dictator. The extensive flooding caused by Hurricane Mitch and the subsequent drought in 1982 once again wrecked roads and buildings across the country, undoing much of the effort to address lacking or damaged infrastructure in Nicaragua by the Sandinistas.[117]

The availability or existence of infrastructure varied from post-revolutionary Cuba to Nicaragua. Although both countries overthrew politically oppressive regimes by way of armed revolution prior to the outset of their respective literacy programs, the Nicaraguan Revolution caused far more extensive physical damage to infrastructure than did the Cuban Revolution. During the late seventies-- what George Black refers to as the "insurrectionary period"-- Somoza's forces inflicted considerable damage on roads,

---

[117] Walker 92.

buildings, and especially schools in an effort to quash the Sandinistas' efforts.[118] One specific example cited by Black and Bevan in their examination of the state of education in Nicaragua following the removal of Somoza from power included the extensive physical damage and looting done to the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua (UNAN) by members of the National Guard.[119]

Damage during the war against Somoza's National Guard caused a considerable amount of infrastructural damage; however, persistent governmental corruption more greatly contributed to the lack of infrastructure in Nicaragua. For example, international organizations such as USAID (United States Agency for International Development) and the World Bank pledged millions of dollars to the country toward investment in infrastructure-building projects. The Nicaraguan government used a vast majority of these funds to enlarge the Somozan government bureaucracy and to enrich the Somoza family itself. Data from USAID corroborated claims of a mismanagement of international aid by Somoza in 1978 when rural dwellers, who account for nearly 50% of the Nicaraguan population, subsisted on approximately 39 dollars per day.[120]

Although Black and Bevan's study detailed extensive damage of schools during the insurrectionary period in the late seventies, others, such as American Sheryl Hirshon, a literacy worker during the 1980 campaign in the village of Muy Muy, noted that more rural areas that "had never been prosperous enough to attract Somoza and his followers, or mountainous enough to shelter guerrillas" remained relatively unscathed by the

---

[118] Black and Bevan 24.
[119] Black and Bevan 28.
[120] Hirshon and Butler 19.

revolution.[121] Although untouched by Somoza, these regions lacked basic infrastructural elements such as roads, which made travel nearly impossible.[122]

The distribution of teachers and schools among the population seriously affected both the start as well as the continuation of a literacy program in Nicaragua. Prior to the outset of the National Literacy Crusade, only 29% of teachers worked in rural areas even though approximately half of the Nicaraguan population resided in these sparsely populated regions.[123] School attendance reflected this disproportionate distribution of teachers, with over 66% of the students enrolled in primary school hailing from urban areas like the cities of Managua, Granada, and León.[124] One of the primary causes for this unequal distribution of educators throughout the country once again stemmed from the government. Somoza often assigned "political favorites" to harder-to-reach, rural villages, resulting in "phantom teaching appointments" as these "educators" rarely ventured to the area where they had been assigned.[125]

The initial rates of illiteracy recorded by census takers in Cuba and Nicaragua before starting their literacy initiatives highlighted each country's infrastructural issues. Nicaragua, the country with the larger illiterate population, also had the higher percentage of people residing in rural areas. For example, rates of illiteracy in the more sparsely populated eastern departments of Puerto Cabezas, Bluefields, and Rama averaged 75% among Nicaraguans over the age of ten.[126] In the most rural regions of the country, rates of illiteracy reached even higher with some areas recording over 90% illiteracy.

---

[121] Black and Bevan 24-25; Hirshon and Butler 19.
[122] Hirshon and Butler; Miller
[123] Arrién 70.
[124] Hirshon and Butler 20.
[125] Hirson and Butler 20-21.
[126] Leiner 279-280.

In addition to infrastructure, the dire financial straits of the Nicaraguan economy following the overthrow of Somoza limited the country's efforts to combat illiteracy during and after the National Crusade. After Somoza left, only $3.5 million remained in the Nicaraguan treasury, and the country had accrued a considerable amount of debt during the ruling tenure of the Somoza family.[127] The approximately $1.6 billion owed to foreign nations constituted the most detrimental feature of this massive, and Sandinista leaders assumed this debt rather than defaulting after the removal of Somoza.[128] With foreign debt equaling approximately 90 percent of Nicaragua's yearly GDP, the Sandinista government faced a difficult obstacle to overcome in trying to implement their various social programs promised during the struggle against Somoza.[129]

Another internal issue unique to Nicaragua involved the existence and use of languages other than Spanish in the country. Particularly in the eastern half of the country, populations within Nicaragua utilized a number of languages--sometimes in place of Spanish--including indigenous languages, Miskito or Creole/English.[130] With a total population of approximately 2.5 million at the time of the Literacy Crusade, Nicaragua's population included 50,000 English speakers and around 100,000 members of various indigenous cultures residing in the eastern portion of Nicaragua.[131] To address illiteracy in this region, planners of the 1980 Literacy Crusade incorporated traditional English or indigenous language speakers interested in participating in the Spanish-language program, and reduced illiteracy in this eastern coastal region to around 30%.[132]

---

[127] Miller 22.
[128] Walker 89.
[129] Miller 31.
[130] Leiner 279.
[131] Miller 16
[132] Leiner 279.

Around 88,400 individuals participated in the 1980 Crusade, but the unfamiliarity or degree of discomfort in even speaking Spanish prevented a number of *costeños* from participating in the initial campaign.[133]

To counter this linguistic stumbling block, the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education also implemented a secondary literacy program starting in October 1980. This program specifically targeted speakers of non-Spanish languages. Albeit carried out with a smaller sized force, the second wave significantly reduced illiteracy among Atlantic Coast residents to a rate of approximately 22%.[134] Even though Nicaraguan literacy workers addressed the needs of non-Spanish speakers during this second wave of the program, this second Nicaraguan program encountered considerable difficulties in recruiting volunteers who could work with people in both English and Spanish, relying primarily on volunteers from other countries.

In addition to infrastructural and linguistic factors affecting the Nicaraguan Crusade, reticence to participate in the program impeded the efforts of planners of the Crusade and literacy workers. Workers in both Cuba and Nicaragua encountered a considerable amount of hesitancy to participate in the program among those reluctant to admit to their own illiteracy. Nicaragua also had to overcome hesitancy related to fear over an earlier effort led by the Somozan government. Entitled "Plan Waslala," this government-sponsored initiative postured itself as a program to address illiteracy in rural Nicaragua in 1978.[135] In reality, the program consisted of 108 persons posing as teachers who worked as spies to root out peasants sympathetic to the FSLN in the mountainous

---

[133] Leiner 280.
[134] Leiner 280.
[135] Miller 21.

region of northern Nicaragua.[136] The name of the program itself evoked a negative image as Somoza's counterinsurgency effort masked beneath the guise of a rural literacy initiative shared the name "Waslala" with a former concentration camp where National Guard members tortured and killed hundreds of Nicaraguan peasants.[137]

Motivation stemming from revolutionary experience affected the Nicaraguan program more so than in Cuba. Organizers of the Cuban campaign certainly capitalized on "revolutionary martyrs" in promoting the program itself, the more widespread struggle in Nicaragua made their use of revolutionary sacrifice more substantial. Thousands of Nicaraguans had died in the fight to remove Somoza, and the experience remained entrenched within the nation's consciousness, something acknowledged as well as utilized by organizers of the Nicaraguan Crusade. In promoting the National Crusade, organizers presented participation in the program as a way to honor to those lost during the fight with Somoza.[138] According to Fernando Cardenal, head of the National Literacy Crusade, "each person learning to read and write would become a living tribute to the sacrifice, commitment, and hope of those had given their lives in battle."[139]

The involvement and incorporation of the Catholic Church in the National Literacy Crusade greatly benefited the Nicaraguan effort. As the Church held a well-respected place within Nicaraguan society, Sandinista leaders capitalized on the influence of the Church in the hopes of not only advancing but possibly ensuring the success of their various goals, including the 1980 Crusade. Crusade planners also utilized the highly

---

[136] Kirkendall 122.
[137] Miller 21.
[138] Miller 24.
[139] Miller 24.

organized structure and hierarchy of the church to attract volunteers to the program.[140] Not only did Nicaraguan leaders work to garner the support of church leaders within Nicaragua, but they appealed to outside groups to further their aims relating to the Literacy Crusade.

The name of the program itself evidences the incorporation of the Church in the planning and implementation of the National Literacy Crusade. In choosing the decidedly religious title of "crusade" over a more secular name like the Cuban "campaign," planners of the Nicaraguan program hoped to establish a positive public image of the literacy program from its inception. In addition to the distinctly pious name of the literacy plan, the Nicaraguan directorate played to the favor of religiously-minded Nicaraguans by placing the priest, Father Fernando Cardenal, at the head of the entire endeavor.[141]

Nicaraguan leaders created an attractive angle to approach outside religious entities for assistance by so closely associating the efforts and aims of the National Literacy Crusade with those of the Catholic Church. Although the United States government did not necessarily support the Nicaraguan Crusade, Crusade leaders appealed to American evangelical organizations for assistance in carrying out the Crusade. For example, Tomas Borge, one of the members of the Nicaraguan Directorate and FSLN, successfully requested eight hundred thousand Spanish-language New Testaments from the United Bible Societies.[142] Aligning with the Catholic Church and promoting literacy as a Christian value allowed Nicaraguan leaders to further their cause with the assistance of the established, traditional power of the Church in the country.

---

[140] Walker 124.
[141] Hodges 270.
[142] Hodges 271.

Nonetheless, their alignment with the Catholic Church and other religious organizations, many inside and outside the country continued to complain of the pro-FSLN message promoted through the Literacy Crusade.

Occurring in two geographically unique regions at two historically distinct times, several variables affected the efficacy of literacy programs implemented in Cuba and Nicaragua. Planners and participants in the Cuban campaign faced some geographical and infrastructure-related issues both prior to and during the 1961 campaign; however, these variables more seriously influenced later efforts in Nicaragua. Infrastructural and financial issues created significant barriers to Nicaraguan literacy workers, but Nicaraguan Crusade planners made considerable efforts internally to offset the various internal variables that could potentially hinder their efforts. In addition to infrastructure, Nicaraguans also contended with a greater degree of linguistic variation within the country as compared to Cuba and even adapted their program to accommodate both English and indigenous language speakers. Involvement or input in the programs by the Catholic Church or other religious groups also varied between the countries with these groups playing a much more influential role in Nicaragua.

External Variables

External features advanced and impeded the successful implementation of the Cuban Literacy Campaign and the National Literacy Crusade in Nicaragua along with the various internal variables. Aid from governmental as well as non-governmental agencies benefitted each country, but the amount of aid received from the international community differed from Cuba to Nicaragua. The impact of external pressures directly related to the Cold War also varied in degree between the programs implemented in Cuba and then

Nicaragua. As these countries' powerful northern neighbor, these forces originated in the United States. The nature and conduct of the Cold War changed considerably within the nearly twenty years separating these countries' educational endeavors. Therefore, the amount this "conflict" affected each country naturally reflected this shift.

A brief note on American foreign policy toward Cuba and Nicaragua

With the already frigid relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, the Cuban Revolution in 1959 represented an intrusion by the Soviet Union into the Western Hemisphere and a threat to American hegemony in the region to many people in the United States. Soon after the fall of Batista, US-Cuban relations quickly soured, and the CIA began actively plotting against the Cuban government and Castro personally. Although the United States officially pursued a policy of non-intervention, the relationship between the Soviet Union and Cuba quickly raised suspicions. Due to these suspicions, the United States' eventually moved away from pursuing a non-interventionist policy toward most of Latin America.

During the Kennedy administration, the United States established several programs to stimulate internal reform in Latin American nations to prevent them from becoming susceptible to revolutionary or socialist or communist-friendly activity. These initiatives included promising $20 million in aid over ten years through the Alliance for Progress; the Peace Corps, a program that "sent thousands of American volunteers to 'third world' countries to start small-scale health, educational, and agricultural projects;" a Food for Peace program; and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), an organization designed to shift foreign capital from military to general

economic assistance.[143] These programs resulted in mixed levels of success. Kennedy's administration intervened actively in Cuba first with the attempted invasion at the Bay of Pigs (Playa Girón) and then during the Cuban Missile crisis. Following the Cuban Missile Crisis, the US instead moved to exclude Cuba from the rest of the hemisphere to weaken Castro's hold on the country rather than continue to organize physical intrusions into the country.[144]

Johnson, for the most part, continued Kennedy's isolation of Cuba rather than attempting to directly intervene in the country.[145] With the election of Richard Nixon in 1968, Henry Kissinger became the Secretary of State, and he pursued a policy of *détente* with communist countries like the Soviet Union and China.[146] Initially supportive of normalizing relations with Cuba and loosening the trade and diplomatic embargo imposed on the country during Kennedy's presidency, Cuba's participation in the liberation movement in Angola quickly reversed Kissinger's view toward the country.[147] As for Nicaragua, the United States continued to support Somoza as he represented a non-leftist stronghold in the region.

Jimmy Carter's administration represented a significant change in American policy toward Latin America, albeit a confused one. During the campaign, Carter placed human rights as one of the central of elements of his proposed foreign policy and distanced himself from the theory of containment to distinguish himself from his Republican opponent.[148] After becoming President, Carter worked to alter some of

---

[143] Gaddis 223-224.
[144] Gaddis 228.
[145] Hammond 216.
[146] Hammond 302-303.
[147] Gaddis 347.
[148] Gaddis 343-344.

United States' relationships with countries in Latin America, including Cuba and Nicaragua. For the most part, however, Carter followed Nixon's foreign policy model. Developed by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, this model included elements of containment as well as *détente*. In keeping with *détente*, President Carter attempted to normalize relations with Cuba and move toward more bilateral relations with the island nation; however, Ronald Reagan's 1980 defeat of Jimmy Carter heralded great changes in the relationships with countries across Latin America, including Cuba and Nicaragua. During Reagan's presidency, the United States more actively pursued its staunchly anti-communist outlook and in doing so rejected the *détente* promoted by Kissinger.

External contributions to Cuba

The impact of external influence varied greatly in the development of the Cuban program and the later Nicaraguan program. Whereas Nicaraguan planners relied greatly on input from outside educational advisors and information published on previously conducted literacy initiatives, organizers of the Cuban campaign preferred relative autonomy when developing their program.[149] Prior to the 1961 Cuban Literacy Campaign, many countries had conducted their own literacy initiatives. The United Nation's educational component UNESCO sponsored many of these; however, in developing its program in the last months of 1960, Cuban planners distanced themselves from earlier practices and methods, choosing instead to focus on the everyday experiences of the average Cuban. In addition to nominal outside pedagogical assistance, the Cuban program received little financial or personnel assistance from outside entities.

---

[149] This is not to suggest that previous efforts had not been made with regard to nationally conducted literacy programs. Rather, in keeping with the wishes of Dr. Raúl Ferrer, the director of the campaign, Cuban organizers wished to develop a program independent of the influence of other individuals or programs so as to develop something unique to the Cuban experience or cultural understanding.

Given the relationship between Cuba and the Soviet Union, the USSR provided necessary financial assistance to Cuba following the United States' placement of an embargo on the country shortly after Castro assumed power.[150] For the most part, however, this assistance manifested itself in contributions to Cuban military rather than scientific, cultural or educational endeavors, like the country's literacy campaign.[151] Aside from nominal aid from the Soviet Union, who had yet to formalize relations with Cuba until after Castro's "Second Declaration of Havana," Cuba received little assistance from other external forces when it conducted of its literacy campaign in 1961.[152] Soviet assistance, however, enabled the Cuban government's ability to carry out programs implemented as part of the *Seguimiento* or follow-up plan.

Even with the financial assistance offered to Cuba from the Soviet Union, relations between the countries remained relatively contentious given the two countries' somewhat contradictory views on foreign policy and the expansion of Marxist thought. During the late 1960s, Cuban-Soviet relations "became increasingly acrimonious," although the Soviet Union continued to support to the Cuban government financially.[153] By the late seventies, relations between the two countries normalized, reflected in the signing of an agreement between the Soviet Union and Cuba in 1979 pledging $3 billion to the island nation. This large sum granted Cuba financial security needed to "attain one of the highest living standards in Latin America."[154]

US-Cuban Relations

---

[150] Blasier and Mesa-Lago 41.
[151] Blasier and Mesa-Lago 43.
[152] Gott 197.
[153] Erisman 25.
[154] Erisman 96.

For the first half of the twentieth century, Cuba and the United States enjoyed a relatively close relationship, with much commerce and travel between the two countries.[155] After Castro and his supporters overthrew of Fulgencio Batista in 1959, the diplomatic, economic, and cultural ties between the two countries quickly began to dissolve. As Castro worked to nationalize most businesses in Cuba and more closely align the country with the Soviet Union, the United States became more suspicious of the charismatic leader and the establishment of a communist nation within reach of the United States.[156] After several failed attempts to assassinate Castro as well as the disastrous 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, the United States, in keeping with George Kennan's idea of "containment," severed all diplomatic and economic ties with Cuba, removed its embassy and placed an embargo on all exports from and most imports into the country.

The CIA-backed invasion at the Bay of Pigs demarcated a poignant moment in US-Cuban relations. Initially put into motion during the Eisenhower administration and carried out in the first days of Kennedy's presidency, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) along with a group of Cuban exiles intended to use an invasion at the Bay of Pigs as the crucial first step in overthrowing Castro's government in Cuba.[157] The nearly immediate failure of this latest American-led effort to enter the island clandestinely and the repulsion of the exiles attempting to invade the island actually greatly benefitted the Cuban government. The botched invasion renewed Cuban mistrust of the United States and *Yanqui* imperialism and reinvigorated the revolutionary fervor of Castro's supporters

---

[155] Louis Pérez Jr.
[156] Erisman 16.
[157] Gott 191.

both in Cuba and across Latin America.[158] The timing of this American failure also proved particularly crucial as the April 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion occurred just prior to the start of the first round of training of literacy workers at Varadero.

After the Bay of Pigs disaster, the CIA continued to orchestrate and attempt to foment rebellions against the Cuban government under the auspices of "Operation Mongoose." Despite the CIA's efforts through "Operation Mongoose," their plans rarely gained much traction.[159] Kennedy's assassination, an escalation of events in Vietnam, and Johnson's focus on civil rights issues internally led to an increasing lack of interest in intervention in Cuba, something later acknowledged by Castro in his report to the First Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) in 1975.[160]

During the Nixon administration, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger considered including Cuba in the relaxation of Cold War containment policy promoted under the auspices of *détente;* however, Cuba's participation in the armed liberation movement in Angola reversed this move to normalize relations with the country.[161] Although Carter also expressed some interest in normalizing relations between the United States and Cuba, these changes never manifested themselves officially. The only major change in American policy toward Cuba occurred in 1981 in the immediate wake of the Reagan Revolution with the publication of the *National Security Directive no. 17 of the President of the United States.* This document attempted to "develop public pressure against Cuba, bringing to light human and political rights issues and using the Cuban exile community

---

[158] Gott 190-191.
[159] Gott 196-197.
[160] Arboleya136-137.
[161] Gaddis 314.

to transmit this message."[162] The directive affected Cuba very little aside from the development of some new right-wing Cuban-American organizations within the United States to foster ill will against Castro's Cuba.

Cuban-Soviet Relations

Although Cuban leaders did not fear the United States as a "'direct' security threat" following the American failure at the Bay of Pigs, concerns related to the economic impact of the embargo motivated Cuban leaders to seek assistance from other nations, most famously the Soviet Union.[163] Cuba tied itself closer to the Soviet Union economically and diplomatically to avoid total isolation following Cuba's expulsion of the island from the Organization of American States (OAS) and subsequent severing of diplomatic ties between nearly every country except Mexico in Latin America.[164] Despite the eventual thawing of relations between Cuba and most of the nations of Latin America toward the close of the twentieth century, the United States maintained its economic and diplomatic isolation of the island, even following the shift in US foreign policy from noninterventionism to the "roll back" plan promoted during the Reagan administration.[165]

Following the invasion at the Bay of Pigs, the removal of Cuba from the Organization of American States, naval blockade of the island, and the Cuban Missile crisis, Cuba sought to establish relationships with outside nations. The Soviet Union quickly appeared to Cuba's aid, initially in an effort to repair ties damaged during the Cuban Missile Crisis.[166] Following a visit to Moscow in 1963, Castro decided to abandon the plans for economic diversification promoted by Ernesto "Che" Guevara and instead

---

[162] Arboleya 222.
[163] Erisman 23.
[164] Erisman 24-25.
[165] Erisman 34.
[166] Gott 209.

concentrate on sugar production with the financial assistance of the Soviet Union.[167] This relationship between the two nations benefitted Cuba because the country received the economic help so desperately needed due to its isolation from the United States and the rest of Latin America; however, the diplomatic ties between Cuba and the Soviet Union signified a major point of contention between the Cuba and its closest American neighbor.

External Contributions to Nicaragua

Nicaragua benefitted greatly from foreign aid when conducting its 1980 Crusade against illiteracy. The Nicaraguan economy, left in shambles by years of war between the FSLN and National Guard as well as Somoza's corrupt handling of internal revenue and international aid, forced the Sandinistas to seek assistance from a plenitude of outside donors both governmental and not. Nicaragua received monetary assistance from a range of organizations and countries, and the World Council of Churches (WCC) represented the largest financial supporter of the campaign. Beginning their work in Nicaragua in late 1979, the WCC provided the campaign $500,000 as part of the $5 million requested for the country from the WCC's member churches.[168]

The WCC provided Nicaragua with a substantial amount of financial and personnel assistance for the National Literacy Crusade; however, Cuba constituted the most constant source of assistance to the country as the Sandinista triumph over Somoza "finally vindicated Havana's faith in the region's leftist potential."[169] The Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries also pledged assistance to the fledgling Nicaraguan

---

[167] Gott 210.
[168] Kirkendall 135-136.
[169] Erisman 138; Kirkendall 136.

government. Aside from sending some small arms some military advisors, both the Soviet Union as well as Nicaragua's allies in Eastern Europe avoiding committing themselves to the defense of Managua or Nicaragua, so as to not raise the ire of the United States.[170]

The Nicaraguan Crusade also benefitted from its relationships with foreign entities in the development of the program itself. The coordinators of the National Literacy Crusade drew extensively from studies published about prior literacy programs throughout the region and elsewhere in the world and assessed work published by UNESCO, Raúl Ferrer, director of the Cuban campaign, and in Guinea Bissau.[171] In addition to reviewing the published work of others involved in literacy programs, Nicaraguan Crusade coordinators also invited several intellectuals to the country to contribute to the development of the primer as well as the structure of the program itself.[172]

While spending nine days in Nicaragua, Brazilian pedagogical theorist Paulo Freire provided some, albeit limited, assistance to the planning of the Nicaraguan Crusade. Despite his abbreviated tenure in the country, Freire's visit to Nicaragua helped to "legitimize the Sandinista campaign in the eyes of many in the international community," making others more willing to work with the fledgling leaders in their ambitious endeavor.[173] Although not exactly analogous to the program Freire implemented in Brazil, planners of the Nicaraguan Crusade benefitted from the assistance and reputation of Freire in organizing the program, and the resultant plan used in the

---

[170] Erisman 139-140.
[171] Arríen 95.
[172] Miller 10-11.
[173] Kirkendall 126.

Literacy Crusade mirrored, to some extent, the methods outlined in his earlier work in rural Brazil.[174]

When the crusade itself began in March 1980, assistance from external sources continued to shape the Nicaraguan Crusade. Cuba, Costa Rica, and the United States provided the most outside educators and educational advisors, but other countries also contributed to Nicaraguan efforts.[175] Foreign aid underwrote a large extent of the crusade given the wrecked state of the Nicaraguan economy. Because the nearly $1.6 billion owed to foreign nations forced the Sandinistas to adopt relatively strict fiscal policies to remain in good favor with entities holding Nicaraguan debt, Nicaraguan leaders appealed to a variety of countries, government-sponsored organizations, and non-governmental organizations for financial assistance. In the last days of the Carter administration, Nicaraguan leaders petitioned specifically for a continuation of funding from the Agency of International Development (USAID) previously granted to Nicaragua under Somoza. The Carter Administration initially granted this renewal, despite the reservations concerning Nicaraguan leadership.

US-Nicaraguan Relations

As opposed to Cuba, the relationship between the United States and Nicaragua has been much more tenuous. Considered as a site for the transoceanic canal eventually constructed in Panama, major economic development and infrastructure work often pandered to American business interests that invested in the country-- most notably those of Cornelius Vanderbilt whose railroad connected the Atlantic and Pacific coast in the

---

[174] Walker 125.
[175] Gott 137-138.

country.[176] In addition to competing American business enterprises at work in the country, Nicaraguans developed a distinct distaste for what they viewed and interpreted as unbridled American imperialism in Latin America, especially in their country, due to their experiences during the multiple American occupations including forces under filibusterer William Walker and United States Marines in Nicaragua during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[177] Even after the departure of the Marines on January 1, 1933, the American-trained Nicaraguan National Guard remained as a reminder of the United States' continued interest and influence in the Central American country.[178]

Following the removal of the Marines, the United States pursued a relatively non-interventionist stance toward Nicaragua, although Somoza continued to benefit from military spending courtesy of the United States.[179] In the 1970s, the FSLN's growing popularity in Nicaragua coupled with the Sandinistas' ties to Cuba heightened suspicions of some working in the US government toward Nicaragua. Although these initial fears manifested themselves among government officials, most notably in the form of an advertisement purchased by one hundred members of Congress and five Senators titled "Congress Asks: Please, Mr. President, Not Another Cuba!," the assassination of ABC correspondent Bill Stewart sparked widespread concern and interest in Nicaragua in the United States.[180] Many remained suspicious of the left-leaning Sandinistas, but news of the atrocities committed by Somoza's National Guard, including Stewart's assassination, led to an increase in an anti-Somozan sentiment within the United States.

---

[176] Pastor 18-19.
[177] Walker
[178] Pastor 25-26.
[179] Pastor 45.
[180] Pastor 143-144.

Soon after the triumph of the Sandinistas over Somoza's forces in August 1979, the specter of communism in Latin America once again haunted the thoughts of many Americans given the relationship between the Cuban government and the FSLN. Reluctant to align too closely with the Sandinistas, the Carter administration maintained a tenuous yet relatively functional relationship with the Sandinistas. Reagan's election in November 1980 represented a major shift in the focus of American foreign policy as conservative groups such as the Santa Fe Committee pushed for several changes in U.S. policy toward Latin America.[181] These changes included a significant increase in an American presence across Latin America but most specifically in the target nations of Cuba, Brazil, and Mexico. US scrutiny also focused on countries allied or aligned with these target nations in any substantial way.[182]

The Reagan administration's abandonment of Carter's policy regarding human rights proved to have its greatest impact on Nicaragua, as the US equated internal revolutionary movements with aggression against external forces or nations and resolved to act "decisively against any manifestation of social rebellion, including 'liberation theology.'"[183] This shift in policy caused the US government to pay a great deal of American attention on Central America and Nicaragua in particular.[184] The United States quickly mobilized efforts against the Sandinistas; manifesting America's altered view

---

[181] Arboleya 220-221.
[182] Arboleya 221.
[183] A term initially coined in Gustavo Gutiérrez's *A Theology of Liberation*, "liberation theology" refers to a political movement within Christian theology that interprets Biblical teachings in the context of a liberation from political, economic, and social injustice. Initially originating as a movement within the Catholic Church, the idea became extremely popular in Nicaragua in the seventies through the writings and teachings of Ernesto Cardenal, a Nicaraguan writer and Catholic priest.
[184] Arboleya 221.

toward Latin America during Reagan's presidency.[185] American influence or involvement in Nicaragua exhibited itself in all facets of Nicaraguan life from the country's relations with other countries to non-governmental organizations and elections, and eventually in the form of the highly destructive Contra War.

Preparation for armed conflict in Nicaragua began almost immediately following Reagan's inauguration in January 1980. In keeping with Reagan's promise to develop "a plan and a hope for the long term—the march of freedom and democracy that will leave Marxism-Leninism on the ash-heap of history," the United States began to invest heavily in a buildup of nuclear arms, conventional weaponry, and most importantly covert and overt support of opponents in a variety of communist or left-leaning countries including Nicaragua.[186] This support of anti-Sandinista forces living both inside Nicaragua and in exile quickly escalated into a heavily US-sponsored armed conflict against the Sandinistas by a group of *contrarrevolucionarios* (counterrevolutionaries), shortened to Contras. Nicaraguans felt the effects of the Contras as these forces sporadically entered the country and mounted small-level attacks primarily in rural areas. These trans-border endeavors by the Contras directly threatened literacy workers and resulted in the deaths of several Nicaraguan brigadistas.

The Contra War represented the most consistent and destructive way American authorities maintained their interests in Nicaragua. As Peter Mayo points out, "the Contra War proved to be the best means of undermining the [Sandinista] revolution" as it not only exhausted the material and financial resources of the country, but the people

---

[185] Walker 129, 190.
[186] Gaddis 356.

to the relatively positive reports issued by the American-based Latin American Studies Association (LASA) as well as European delegations that observed the election.[192]

In both Cuba and Nicaragua, external variables significantly impacted each program, with the influence of these variables decidedly more negative in the 1980 Nicaraguan Crusade. Some of these external variables, including financial support from other countries like the Soviet Union to Cuba or organizations like the World Council of Churches to Nicaragua, greatly benefitted the efforts in both countries to push forth their plans to address illiteracy. Other externalities, however, proved to be more detrimental to each country, with the US's shift in policy toward each country as the most influential. Although the US government did not support Castro's government and even coordinated several efforts to overthrow the Cuban government, the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion in early 1961 and the subsequent emigration of many potential counterrevolutionaries from Cuba caused the US to rework its approach in dealing with the island nation. The United States adopted and pursued a less intrusive plan that focused on isolating the country financially, diplomatically, and politically from the rest of the hemisphere. By 1980, public opinion and policy in the US changed, and the country adopted a much more proactive stance toward defending the hemisphere from perceived communist threats. This shift not only impacted Nicaragua's ability to carry out its 1980 Crusade, but also made it increasingly more difficult for the Nicaraguan government to implement subsequent measures to ensure the successes reached during the five-month program.

---

[192] Walker 58.

How successful were these programs?

Although many have questioned the exact numbers published by the Cuban and Nicaraguan governments concerning illiteracy both before and after their respective literacy programs, these programs made significant advances toward lowering the number of illiterate adults in each country. In addition to the Cuban Campaign and the Nicaraguan Crusade leading to higher rates of literacy in each country, both programs also helped to bridge the vast divide separating urban and rural populations as well as upper and middle-class residents from urban poor or campesinos; to expand the social roles and responsibilities of women; to generate support for each country's revolutionary governments and to serve as a source of national pride. The success of Cuban and Nicaraguan programs extended beyond the borders of each country, as these countries' experiences in developing and carrying out extensive nationwide literacy initiatives had (and has) international implications, particularly in the field of adult literacy education.

Increase in school attendance

In both Cuba and Nicaragua, one of the primary problems associated with illiteracy stemmed from low or no school attendance among illiterate populations. Therefore, an increase in school attendance in urban and rural areas across both countries marked a successful result of both the 1961 National Literacy Campaign and the 1980 National Literacy Crusade. As MacDonald noted in reference to the Cuban campaign, the "first impact of the revolution was a spectacular *quantitative* increase in all the indices," school attendance. More importantly, however, qualitative improvements needed to follow initial quantitative gains to preserve gains made during literacy programs.[193]

---

[193] MacDonald 94.

Attendance at Cuban primary schools increased significantly after the 1961 Cuban Literacy Campaign. Three years prior to the campaign in 1958, approximately 737,000 students regularly attended primary school. By 1962, this number increased to around 1,350,000 students, reflecting an increase from 50% to 80% among children aged seven to fourteen.[194] Although the Cuban government initially experienced some difficulty in accommodating this dramatic increase in students, the Cuban government made a concerted effort to provide provisional classroom space until it could provide more permanent educational facilities.

Following the Nicaraguan Crusade, school attendance increased significantly. By 1982, two years after the close of the program, school attendance had doubled from its 1978 level.[195] To accommodate higher levels of attendance, the Nicaraguan government, utilizing a significant amount of outside financial assistance, began constructing new schools or repairing schools destroyed during the Nicaraguan Revolution. Nicaraguan leaders worked to improve roads across the country, particularly in the traditionally underserved, rural areas. A dramatic increase in war-related expenditures, however, precluded this short-lived governmental investment in its educational infrastructure. By the mid-eighties, the Nicaraguan government halted all government-sponsored school construction as war-related expenditures consumed over half the national budget.[196] The disruptive effects of war also negatively affected school attendance, and the number of students enrolled and regularly attending schools dropped consistently through the turbulent eighties.

---

[194] MacDonald 94-95.
[195] Walker 129.
[196] Walker 129.

Closing economic/geographic divide

Prior to the Cuban Revolution, "the feudal acceptance of upper and lower class positions, rich and poor, [was] still a dominant feature of society."[197] The preservation of traditional social structures greatly stratified Cuban society with upper-class men and women holding few or no responsibilities, instead relying upon the work of lower-class domestic workers in their homes.[198] The concentration of wealth among approximately 20% of the population stratified Nicaraguan society, and men and women within this group did little to no work, especially none that required physical labor. Economic and geographic divides in the population persisted after the removal of Batista and Somoza, and the new leaders in each country sought to implement wide-reaching social programs to address these issues. The Sandinistas of course included a nationwide literacy program as a key piece among their social programs.

Although not a primary goal of the Cuban Literacy Campaign or the Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade, the programs in each country narrowed the economic and geographic divides within Cuba and Nicaragua. For the most part, the literacy programs provided an opportunity for primarily middle-class, urban youths to experience impoverished, rural life. Those who worked in the programs in both countries often noted their shock after seeing how most of the participants lived, a sentiment included in the narratives by Jonathan Kozol, Sheryl Hirshon, and Valerie Miller. Through participation in the programs, many literacy workers not only came to understand the people with whom they worked but could also better conceptualize the vast income disparities that characterized each nation.

---

[197] Robert Freeman Smith 198.
[198] Smith 199.

In a speech given by Castro in March 1961 to brigadistas in training at Varadero, Castro made clear the connection between the work of the campaign and the integration of urban and rural life.[199] Jonathon Kozol, an American who studied the Cuban campaign in 1976, noted the relationships established between literacy workers and former pupils.[200] Even those who did not maintain a close personal relationship with those they taught, took a greater understanding of rural life from their experience, and many continued to volunteer and participate in programs to help bridge the divide between economic or social classes. By continuing to work to close this economic divide, former Cuban brigadistas suggest a certain degree of "consciousness-raising" resultant from their work as part of the Cuban Campaign.[201]

Jan Flora, John McFadden and Ruth Warner further explicated this consciousness-raising among literacy workers in their study of the Nicaraguan experience. Most brigadistas grew up or lived in major cities and many had never left these cities. The experience in the countryside worked as a learning experience for them more than those learning how to read. Overcoming problems such as fatigue, disease, hunger, and occasionally death, brigadistas experienced firsthand the difficult lifestyle of many of their fellow countrymen had due to their economic status.[202] For many like Maria Elena, a participant in the Nicaraguan Crusade, living and working with the family

[199] Kozol 26.
[200] Kozol 36.
[201] A term defined by Paulo Freire in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to describe a person's understanding the social and political contradictions of the world and taking action against them (in Portuguese: conscientização)
[202] Flora, McFadden, Warner 55.

she taught provided insight into the struggles faced by many Nicaraguans and exposed her to a lifestyle she knew little to nothing of prior to her participation.[203]

In addition to the experience in the campaign itself, Cuba attempted to bridge the regional and economic gap while still promoting educational improvements through its countryside schools. Constructed in each of Cuba's provinces, these schools offered free education for children in grades six through ten, with students participating in three hours of agricultural work per day.[204] The inclusion of agricultural work in these countryside schools served two primary purposes. First, the Cuban government hoped the exposure and experience in agricultural work would work to integrate the heavily-stratified social classes in Cuba, starting with the children participating in the work.[205] Financial necessity constituted the second purpose, as the agricultural output of the schools defrayed the cost of constructing and maintaining the school, and the Cuban government hoped the ability to earn money through the work would address delinquency among poorer students who often left school to help their families during planting and harvest seasons.[206]

Literacy programs conducted in Cuba and Nicaragua addressed narrowing the economic and geographic divide crippling each country. The construction of new schools and roads in both countries gave a greater percentage of the population access to primary and secondary schooling, something severely lacking in the rural areas in both countries where illiteracy was highest. Programs included as part of the follow-up measures in Cuba and Nicaragua helped many reach "literacy" even after the programs had officially ended. Follow-up programs included small, local reading groups in Nicaragua and were

---

[203] Flora, McFadden, Warner 55-56.
[204] Figueroa, Prieto, Gutiérrez 31.
[205] Figueroa, Prieto, Gutiérrez 18.
[206] Figueroa, Prieto, Gutiérrez 41-43.

essential to achieving the program's goals due to the time constraints shorter length of the Nicaraguan Crusade.[207] Technical training in Cuba and Nicaragua served to close the economic chasm as it allowed those trained to obtain higher paying positions.

Farmer-Worker Training

Both Cuba and Nicaragua used their literacy programs to transition into more advanced educational initiatives to close the economic divide. Farmer-worker educational programs constituted the most substantial way in which Cuba and Nicaragua sought address the issue of economic inequality and established these programs after the conclusion of each country's initial program. The specific format of the programs differed greatly from on-the-job vocational training to more formalized colleges to prepare individuals to enter universities, and each one of the programs sought to address the problems related to the vast economic divides in the countries as well as the stunted state of industrialization and lack of technical progress in all fields. Cuba and Nicaragua developed some programs to train workers to participate in an industrial setting, but the majority focused on topics and issues concerning agriculture as both countries' economies depended on the export of agricultural products.

The Minimum Vocational Training Programs represented the most basic series of courses offered to Cuban workers, and they consisted of six to eight months of training focused to a specific field (often agriculture) as well as heavily emphasized Spanish and basic arithmetic.[208] Other transitional programs included "People's Schools" that targeted farmers left jobless due to automation and mechanization. These schools included courses in "cultural studies" (arithmetic, Spanish) and training for a new job. Worker's

---

[207] Hirshon and Butler 212.
[208] Lorenzo 70-71.

Preparatory Colleges made up another portion of the Cuban worker-farmer educational initiatives, and these "colleges" prepared undereducated farmers and workers to enter affiliated Cuban universities to further their studies in a technical field.[209]

Even though the worker-farmer programs established in Cuba allowed many Cubans to further their education and therefore expand their ability to participate economically, politically, and socially in the country, the programs encountered some difficulties. Dr. Raúl Ferrer, the Director of Worker-Farmer Education, admitted that the Cuban worker-farmer faced a multitude of complications including shortages of books and teachers in rural areas as well as retention of pupils and instructors.[210] Despite the issues faced by the worker-farmer education programs, they attained a measurable degree of success, with 70% of those who had learned to read during the 1961 Campaign enrolling in one or more of the programs offered within the Department of Worker-Farmer Education.[211]

The Sandinistas used their National Literacy Crusade as a stepping stone to further educational programs tailored for laborers and those working in agriculture. Advances in agriculture presented themselves as the most pressing area of need as most farmers utilized severely antiquated farming techniques. Concentrated ownership of land among a limited number of wealthy landowners left a majority of the fertile Nicaraguan landscape vastly underutilized.[212] The confiscation and redistribution to peasants or government run cooperatives of lands previously held by the Somoza family and his supporters contributed to the worker-farmer educational programs as newly available

---

[209] Lorenzo 71.
[210] Lorenzo 74.
[211] Lorenzo 74.
[212] Saldaña –Portillo 130.

land served as an incentive for many to participate in the various programs associated with this specific initiative.[213] Although approximately 80,000 Nicaraguan peasants benefitted from agrarian reform, the devastating financial impact of the Contra War forestalled more extensive land distribution projects or worker-farmer educational initiatives, especially in regions most affected by Contra-related violence.[214]

Expanded Role of Women

Aside from the gains made in both countries to lower rates of illiteracy, each program expanded the roles and opportunities offered or available to girls and women in Cuba and Nicaragua. Women and girls participated on both sides of the campaigns, taking part as students as well as teachers and/or other logistical or support roles, and this participation allowed many their first chance to work outside the home and live autonomously. The participation of women and girls in Cuba and Nicaragua also worked to break down some of the social stratification that had resulted from the vast disparities in income between gender groups in both countries.

One of the explicit goals of the Cuban revolution included guaranteeing economic, political, and social equality of Cuban men and women, and revolutionary government in Cuba viewed the literacy campaign as the essential first step toward actualizing that goal. Prior to the Cuban Revolution, the majority of Cuban women worked in menial positions as farm workers or in domestic jobs. Castro's government acknowledged that the only way to incorporate this wide segment of the population into Cuba's agricultural and industrial revolution necessitated "improve[ing] their cultural and technical education and to find them work adapted to their ability to free them from

---

[213] Saldaña-Portillo 126-127; Walker 119-121.
[214] Saldaña-Portillo 139-140.

economic and social subjection."[215] During the campaign itself, women played an instrumental role, as volunteers and as participants. To continue the strides toward expanding literacy among Cuban women, the Cuban government established the Department of Schools for Women's Educational Improvement to head initiatives to further integrate women into the social, political, and economic spheres in the country.[216]

Two of the central organs of this Department consisted of the "night school for menial workers" established in Havana in 1961 and the Ana Betancourt School for farmwomen. By 1962, 20,000 women had enrolled in the Havana night school conducted in sixty locations in the city and surrounding province, taking courses in driving training, typing, shorthand, and business administration.[217] Pupils at the Ana Betancourt School included girls from rural provinces, with most originating from Oriente Province. These girls attended the school on government scholarships to take courses in a variety of subjects, with the best students continuing in agricultural technology.[218] Ana Lorenzo noted in her 1962 report for UNESCO that Cuba expanded the availability of educational opportunities for women in the following year (1963) and continued to do so in subsequent years.[219]

Nicaraguan women benefitted greatly from its 1980 National Literacy Crusade. With women and girls constituting sixty percent of the volunteer teaching corps, they clearly played a crucial role in the implementation of the program, and participation offered many their first chance to leave their sheltered home lives to take advantage of a

---

[215] MacDonald 109.
[216] Lorenzo 68.
[217] MacDonald 110.
[218] MacDonald 110.
[219] Lorenzo 69.

host of new opportunities and responsibilities.[220] In addition to those working as literacy volunteers, other Nicaraguan women organized themselves into "mothering committees" who worked to motivate others to participate in the literacy program as well as to provide "logistical and moral support" to the brigadistas in the field.[221]

National Pride/Support for Revolutionary Governments

Utilizing a decidedly political message in both programs, leaders in both Cuba and Nicaragua aimed to rally support for the revolutionary governments through their literacy initiatives and to develop a sense of revolutionary nationalism or national pride. The manner each country carried out this objective varied; however, the purpose remained the same. In provoking a positive response through the use of nationalist symbols, leaders in each country hoped participants would then create a natural association between the revolutionary governments and these symbols. One element central to this development of a sense of national pride through the literacy programs in Cuba and Nicaragua included a focus on individuals important to the country or revolution itself. Even though the Cuban and Nicaraguan focus on individuals did not exactly reflect Freirean pedagogical methods, the names of these individuals represented a reality of those participating on all sides of the program.

Castro's personal appeal proved to be central to the Cuban ability to foster support for revolutionary aims. An avid supporter of the program, Castro made himself particularly available and visible at all stages of the 1961 Campaign. In interviews with participants in the Cuban campaign, Kozol showed how the avid support and visibility of the Cuban leader during the campaign proved essential to recruiting volunteers and later

---

[220]Kirkendall 134.
[221] Kirkendall 134.

motivating them to continue in their contributions to revolutionary aims. After their stint as brigadistas, many participants joined civic organizations like the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, which provided social services to underserved or impoverished Cubans.[222]

One element of Cuban life that reflects the legacy of the Literacy Campaign as well as its association with the State government is the museum dedicated to the campaign itself. Located on the grounds of a school converted from a military base in Marianao, a suburb west of Havana, the museum houses memorabilia of the campaign including brigadista uniforms, the characteristic lantern carried by all literacy teachers, bound copies of the teachers' reports concerning their experiences in the field, as well as the "Dear Fidel" letters composed by those who successfully completed the literacy program.[223] Cuban schools also worked to instill or enhance national and revolutionary pride from the literacy campaign.

In Nicaragua, Augusto Sandino represented the most obvious use of symbolic imagery to evoke a positive nationalist response. A Nicaraguan guerilla leader who fought against U.S. Marine forces in the country and who first Somoza later killed in 1934, Sandino had almost a mythological image in the minds of many Nicaraguans.[224] Materials used during the Crusade played upon the image and legacy of Augusto Sandino and dedicated the first chapter of the primer to him. Unlike the Cubans, however, organizers of the Nicaraguan Crusade did not seek to develop a "cult of personality" around the members of the National Directorate or ruling junta members but instead

---

[222] Kozol 65-66.
[223] Gott 189.
[224] Kirkendall 129.

focused on the heroes of the recently concluded war, including FSLN founder Carlos Fonseca (killed in 1976) as well as the various students and other Nicaraguans killed by supporters of Somoza.[225]

In addition to the promotion of the FSLN as the current representatives of Sandino's nationalistic aims, the Sandinistas also extensively referenced Somoza as the cause for the plenitude of problems faced by Nicaraguans and the country as a whole. A 25% reduction in Nicaragua's gross national product in 1979 forced the Sandinistas to adopt strict austerity measures, and they communicated their rationale for the harsh economic conditions through the campaign stating in the primer, "To spend little, to conserve resources, and to produce much is to make the revolution."[226] Aligning themselves with symbolic images and individuals central to Nicaraguan nationalist thought and in presenting themselves in stark contrast to Somoza, the FSLN generated some degree of support among campesinos, but the most significant growth of support came from the ranks of the literacy workers themselves.

Now fully experienced in the harsh realities faced by their impoverished countrymen in the countryside as well as in cities, most former brigadistas "continued to volunteer to work at harvest time or in civil and military defense," showing a greater interest in health and rural life in general due to their experiences during the campaign.[227] Other volunteer groups within Nicaragua worked to bolster support for the Literacy Crusade and other social programs initiated by the Sandinistas, viewing these

---

[225]Kirkendall 130.
[226] Kirkendall: 131.
[227] Kirkendall 134.

improvements as an objective shared by all Nicaraguans.[228] Even though the study conducted by Jan Flora, John McFadden, and Ruth Warner observed that thirteen percent of participants attributed their decrease in revolutionary support to the National Literacy Crusade, a majority of participants reflected positively upon their experience and Sandinista leadership.[229]

Expansion of studies on pedagogy

Both the Cuban and Nicaraguan literacy programs contributed greatly to the field of pedagogy, specifically in addressing adult illiteracy. Prior to the Cuban Campaign in 1961, few had attempted field research or official studies regarding illiteracy, and those that existed had been by and large unsuccessful. Although the field itself had expanded by 1980 when Nicaragua conducted its National Literacy Crusade, their program offered an opportunity to put into practice the theories developed by Paulo Freire in the mid-sixties. Both programs influenced the shift in literacy teaching and program models from the previously relied-upon Laubach method to the more participatory and socially contextualized methods promoted by thinkers like Freire.

Although UNESCO immediately acknowledged the work done to lower levels of illiteracy in Cuba, the organization did not adopt or adapt the Cuban program to literacy campaigns conducted by itself or its affiliates until much later. In 1965, UNESCO announced it would conduct twelve pilot literacy programs.[230] With approximately thirty-two million dollars at its disposal, UNESCO conducted eleven programs and, each

---

[228] Walker 149-150.
[229] Flora, McFadden, Warner
[230] Kozol 72

eventually failed.[231] This failure is especially peculiar as the organization had extensive information about the 1961 Cuban campaign in the form of a report compiled by Dr. Ana Lorenzetto.[232]

At the 1965 meeting of UNESCO in Tehran, Dr. Raúl Ferrer, the head of the Cuban Literacy Campaign, brought and distributed five hundred copies of Lorenzetto's study that UNESCO initially refused to publish.[233] During the course of the conference and in subsequent years, Cuban leaders continued to advocate for a publishing of Lorenzetto's study in full by UNESCO, but objections over the explicitly political message within the Cuban program made UNESCO leaders hesitant to comply. In 1965, UNESCO finally published Lorenzetto's study, although on a limited scale.[234] UNESCO eventually published a review of the Cuban program compiled under Ferrer by the Educational Development Centre in Havana.[235] Ferrer's work, along with Lorenzetto's, helped to revolutionize the focus in studies on literacy from the structured methodical approach preferred by UNESCO to the socio-culturally focused, participatory approach used in Cuba, a method also promoted by Brazilian Paulo Freire.

Who was more successful? Why?

Given its ability to more extensively implement the *Seguimiento* (follow up plan) and thus preserve the gains made during its literacy program, Cuba's 1961 Literacy Campaign was more successful than its 1980 Nicaraguan counterpart. From the outset, Cuba faced fewer obstacles including infrastructural, geographical, or linguistic issues

---

[231] Kozol 73-74
[232] Kozol 74-75.
[233] Kozol 78
[234] Kozol 74.
[235] Max Figueroa, Abel Prieto, and Raúl Gutiérrez, "The basic secondary school in the country: an educational innovation in Cuba (Paris: The UNESCO Press, 1974)

and enjoyed far greater levels of political stability during the 1961 Literacy Campaign and subsequent years following its initial effort to eradicate illiteracy. Cuba also did not suffer the destabilizing effects of a war or face nearly constant invasion by counterrevolutionary forces. In addition to success within the country, Cuba's program profited on an international scale as others--including Nicaragua-- looked to the program when developing their own literacy programs. Fifteen countries have even enjoyed Cuban assistance on a more practical level in the form of Cuban teachers or educational advisors to help carry out literacy efforts in these other nations.

Ability to maintain intra-national stability

Intra-national stability proved absolutely vital to the preservation of the gains achieved during the literacy campaign conducted in Cuba. With the presence of anti-governmental forces in both countries, the Nicaraguan and Cuban governments had to control the possible destabilizing actions these groups could implement. Although both countries experienced some degree of counterrevolutionary activity, the Cuban government's ability to control and limit the destructive effects of anti-governmental forces remaining in the country following the Bay of Pigs invasion certainly played a role in the its continuation of educational programs, as compared to Nicaragua. The timing of the Cuban campaign most significantly affected how anti-government forces shaped the implementation of the literacy program because by the time the Cuban Literacy Campaign began in 1961, most political dissidents had left the island, counterrevolutionary attempts at Castro and his government had already proven unsuccessful, and Castro had spent two years consolidating political power.

Shortly after Castro took control in the Cuban government, opponents began organizing plans to remove him and his supporters from power. After the failed invasion at the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban government detained those working internally against Castro's government who did not leave the island as exiles, effectively destroying counterrevolutionary momentum.[236] Anti-governmental forces persisted in making attempts to thwart the efforts of Castro, and these efforts resulted in the death of some literacy workers, most famously Manuel Ascunce Domenesch; however, for the most part, the Cuban government quashed most attempts to disrupt the Literacy Campaign or subsequent government programs related to education.[237]

As opposed to the Cuban government's relatively successful containment of political dissent within the country, the FSLN-led Nicaraguan government contended with a considerable amount of dissent internally. This dissent, especially within the Nicaraguan government itself, proved relatively detrimental to the Sandinista's ability to implement the various social programs. *La Prensa,* the largest newspaper in Nicaragua, and its publisher Violeta Chamorro represented a significant source of dissent against the Sandinista government, and Chamorro even resigned from her place on the junta within months of the Sandinista Revolution.[238] Dissent in Nicaragua included criticism of the 1980 Literacy Crusade as some, including Alfonso Robelo, complained, "was being organized in such a way as to manipulate the poor and the ignorant for ideological or partisan political ends."[239]

---

[236] Arboleya 93.
[237] Kozol 12.
[238] Shirley Christian 171-172, 189.
[239] Christian 172

When governmental power transferred in 1990 from the Sandinistas to Violeta Barrios Chamorro the more conservative UNO party, dissent to Sandinista social programs including education continued under the leadership of the new ruling group. During Chamorro's presidency, Nicaragua adopted harsh austerity measures to comply with the wishes of lending organizations including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Chamorro's adoption of austere fiscal practices led to cuts to many of the social programs initiated by the Sandinistas, including education. In addition to austere spending practices, Chamorro's government also sought to "de-Sandinize" education. Efforts to this extent included replacing the culturally and socially relevant "Carlitos" primer with a more generic version supplied by USAID funds; hiring only members of the UNO-friendly Nicaraguan Teachers' Union Federation rather than members of ANDEN, a group traditionally supportive of the Sandinistas; and laying off or transferring 370 teachers for primarily political reasons.[240]

Public reinvestment in education

As the continuation of efforts to expand educational opportunities for Cuban and Nicaraguan citizens proved to be particularly crucial to preserving gains made during the initial literacy programs, government expenditures once again highlight the disparity between the two nations. Public spending in the field of education serves as one clear way to help to explain Cuba's ability to ensure the success of its 1961 Campaign. For example, during the 2007 fiscal year the World Bank reported that public expenditures on

[240] Walker 132.

education constituted 11.9% of Cuba's gross domestic product (GDP).[241] In the years since the 1961 Campaign, education-related expenditures have consistently equaled at least 10% of the country's GDP. The substantial percentage marked for education not only evidences Cuba's national focus on providing education to its citizens but also helps to explain the Cuban ability to maintain its success in addressing illiteracy in the country.

Nicaragua, on the other hand, spends a significantly smaller amount on public education, something reflected in their considerably higher levels of illiteracy. According to the audit performed by USAID in 2008, spending on education only made up 2.2% of the Nicaraguan GDP during the 2007 fiscal year.[242] In the years since the completion of its literacy campaign, Nicaragua has consistently underspent on education compared to Cuba. Although initially the result of the extreme financial constraints caused by the Contra War, the defeat of the Sandinistas and election of Violeta Chamorro and the UNO in 1990 proved more detrimental to education. Throughout the 1990s, Chamorro's administration continued to make considerable cuts in social spending, especially education. Even though increased spending in education does not necessarily yield better results, the gulf between the amount dedicated to public education in Cuba and Nicaragua to some extent explains Cuba's ability to better address illiteracy in the years since its 1961 Campaign.

Cuba's international influence

Certainly, the influence the Cuban program has had and continues to have internationally evidences the country's success with regard to its 1961 Literacy

---

[241] United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics, "Public spending on education, total (% of GDP)," The World Bank Group (2012) http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GD.ZS (accessed March 20, 2012).
[242] United States Agency for International Development, *Audit of USAID/ Nicaragua's Education Activities*, (San Salvador: USAID, 2008): 8.

Campaign. Even after the close of their own program, Cuba maintained its support of global literacy initiatives, albeit for some political reasons. Political motivations aside, Cuba's persistent contribution to work in other countries remains noteworthy. The Cuban government has provided advisory help and Cuban teachers to literacy programs across the globe. In the years since its own literacy campaign, Cuba has contributed to literacy programs in fifteen countries, with the most extensive assistance going to its Nicaraguan allies in 1980.

Cuba did not confine its educational influence to physical contributions to other countries' literacy programs. Its program also served as a model for several subsequent educational initiatives following the publishing of the Lorenzetto study on the Cuban Campaign as well as Paulo Freire's dissemination of Cuban pedagogical methods and techniques in conjunction with his own following his 1963 visit to the island. The impact of the 1961 Literacy Campaign extended past the field of literacy with thinkers in other fields also influenced and impressed by the accomplishments made during the program. For example, French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre commended the Cuban revolution for its ability to reply to the material needs of its people through its social programs, most specifically the Literacy Campaign and agrarian reform.[243]

Although initially hesitant to award Cuba for its work due to the possible political repercussions, UNESCO eventually awarded Cuba a King Sejong Literacy Prize in 2006 for the country's continued dedication to the promotion of literacy in its country and abroad.[244] In awarding the country, UNESCO also noted the incorporation of new

---

[243] Paolucci 249-250.
[244] UNESCO, "2006 UNESCO Literacy Prize winners announced," (June 2006) Retrieved from http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=33384&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

technology and teaching methods into the original Cuban program. The constant updating, revising, and adapting of the original Cuban program model reflects the country's dedication to literacy even after completing its own campaign in 1961. These processes are essential to remaining culturally and socially relevant to those participating in literacy programs, an idea central to the Cuban program and its initial success.

Nicaragua

In determining success, however, one would be remiss in failing to note the resourcefulness of the Nicaraguan effort and the country's ability to make strides toward lowering or eliminating illiteracy given the dire economic, political, and diplomatic straits of the country prior to and during the Crusade itself. The Sandinista's insistence on "non-alignment" deserves mention as a noble facet of the Nicaraguan program as it helped Nicaragua curry favor with some countries and organizations that responded by aiding the nation in its educational endeavors. The incorporation of the Catholic Church and Christian teachings into the program requires specific mention, as this proved crucial to the crusade's success. Unfortunately, the numerous obstacles before Nicaragua and its brigadistas proved to be relatively insurmountable, making their efforts to reduce illiteracy less statistically successful than the Cuban program. According to a 1983 UNESCO report, the Literacy Crusade, in conjunction with other government programs enacted during the early years of Sandinista rule including expanded health services, price controls for "basic foodstuffs" and some subsidies "stimulated improvement in the living standards of the working classes," a considerable step forward for a nation so wrecked by years of government graft and revolutionary instability. [245]

---

[245] Kirkendall 140

Dedication to non-alignment

Nicaragua stood apart from Cuba in one way through its dedication to non-alignment. As the country required outside assistance to keep the country afloat after the massive accrual of debt during the Somoza years, Sandinista leaders made a concerted effort not to align too closely with any one country in a way that would alienate it from another. For example, the FSLN had a long-standing and close relationship with Cuba; however, Nicaragua shied away from establishing too close a relationship with Cuba's ally, the Soviet Union, for fear of raising suspicions in the United States. The one-year anniversary celebration for the triumph of the Sandinistas over Somoza served as one instance in which Nicaraguan leaders attempted to display their dedication to non-alignment, as the invitees to the event included representatives from the Soviet Union, Cuba, and a large delegation from the United States.[246]

Despite the Sandinistas' attempt at non-alignment, their support of Salvadoran rebels eventually served as the justification for the US's withdrawal of support for the Nicaraguan government in 1980. Initially, the most detrimental factor of the United States ending its support of Nicaragua included a halt of US foreign aid to the country. In 1980, US aid to Nicaragua totaled $15 million and would have increased $35 million according to the proposed 1981 budget.[247] Although the loss of funds destabilized the country to some extent, the outset of the US-sponsored Contra War further complicated Nicaragua's ability to ally itself with other countries, as many feared a negative backlash from the United States.

Churches

---

[246] Christian 189.
[247] Christian 226.

The incorporation of Christian groups, and more specifically, the Catholic Church, reflected yet another area in which the Nicaraguan planners displayed their resourcefulness in developing and implementing the 1980 Literacy Crusade.[248] A variety of organizations supported the work of the Literacy Crusade; however, the support of the Church proved especially crucial as it provided the stability of an established hierarchy. This alliance also helped to dispel suspicions that the Nicaraguan government intended to use the program to spread pro-FSLN propaganda among rural populations. The support of the Catholic Church and other religious organizations backed the Crusade financially and supplied volunteers and support staff for the program itself. The World Council of Churches, a Protestant organization that included approximately 38 different groups, served as the greatest source of financial assistance, donating $500,000 to the 1980 Crusade.[249] Despite the split within the Nicaraguan Church over the teachings of liberation theology and the FSLN itself, the Church as a whole remained supportive of Sandinista efforts to increasing literacy.

Conclusion

When assessing the literacy programs conducted by Cuba and Nicaragua in 1961 and 1980, it is difficult to definitively say whether or not either program succeeded absolutely. Such a judgment may not even be fair to make. Even though both countries had recently emerged from a revolutionary struggle, the Nicaraguan Revolution damaged the country physically, fiscally, and psychologically far more than the earlier Cuban Revolution. Castro's Cuba, albeit relatively dependent on exports from the United States,

---

[248] Walker 124.
[249] Kirkendall 135-136

did not inherit $1.6 billion worth of foreign debt and a country decimated by years of armed struggle as the Sandinistas would experience in 1979.[250]

The state of each country during the implementation of each literacy program is yet another issue worth considering. Nicaragua had to overcome considerable infrastructural hurdles to mobilize literacy workers in the geographically challenging rural departments where most of the populations targeted by the Literacy Crusade resided. A country divided by geographical barriers, Nicaraguan brigadistas encountered considerable difficulty in even reaching their assigned positions, much less acclimating themselves to the campesino lifestyle practiced by those with which they lived and worked. The relationship each country shared with the United States; however, proved to be the most influential factor on the ability of each program to preserve gains made during its literacy programs.

Although the US did not support Castro or his government, following the failure at the Bay of Pigs the United States pursued a much less intrusive approach in dealing with the island nation. Nicaragua, on the other hand, became a primary focus of the US following the Sandinista victory over Somoza, and the US-sponsored Contra War only further depleted the few resources available to the Nicaraguan government, eventually forcing the Sandinistas to halt school construction and new educational endeavors by the mid-eighties. Chamorro and the UNO's defeat of the Sandinistas in the 1990 election only further contributed to Nicaragua's inability to properly address illiteracy, as Chamorro's conservative administration cut all areas of social spending, particularly education.

---

[250] Louis Pérez Jr., *Cuba Between Reform and Revolution*, 296-297.

Cuba remains a bastion of literacy with one of the lowest levels of illiteracy in the entire world; however, many continue to question the validity of Cuba's claims of having approximately 2% illiteracy. In comparison with Nicaragua's 22.5% rate of illiteracy among people older than 15, Cuba has certainly been more successful in preserving the gains made during their Literacy Campaign through extensive investment in educational projects for both Cuban children and adults.[251] Nicaragua's efforts to eliminate illiteracy, although valiant, eventually proved less successful than their earlier Cuban counterpart.

[251] Figures for literacy retrieved from the CIA's World Fact Book

Bibliography

Arboleya, Jésus. *The Cuban Counter-Revolution.* Translated by Rafael Betancourt. Center for International Studies at Ohio University, 2000.

Arríen, Juan B. *Nicaragua, diez años de educación en la revolución: contexto, avances, problemas y un proceso de transformación.* Managua: Ministerio de Educación, 1989.

Black, George and John Bevan. *The loss of fear: education in Nicaragua before and after the revolution.* Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign: World University Service, 1980.

Blasier, Cole and Carmelo Mesa-Lago, editors. *Cuba in the World.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979.

Borge, Tomas, Carlos Fonesca, Daniel Ortega, Humberto Ortega, and Jaime Wheelock. *Sandinistas Speak.* Edited by Bruce Marcus. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1982.

Castro, Fidel. "First Declaration of Havana." Speech given at La plaza de la república, Havana, Cuba. September 2, 1960.

Castro, Fidel. "The Problem of Cuba and its Revolutionary Policy. Speech given at the meeting of the United Nations. New York, New York. September 26, 1960.

Christian, Shirley. *Nicaragua: Revolution in the Family, with new material on the Contra.* New York: Vintage Books, 1986.

Erisman, H. Michael. *Cuba's International Relations: The Anatomy of a Nationalistic Foreign Policy.* Boulder: Westview, 1985.

Figueroa, Max, Abel Prieto, and Raúl Gutiérrez. "The basic secondary school in the country: an educational innovation in Cuba." Paris: The UNESCO Press, 1974.

Flora, Jan L., John McFadden, Ruth Warner. "The Growth of Class Struggle: The Impact of the Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade on the Political Consciousness of Young Literacy Workers." *Latin American Perspectives* 10 (1983): 45-61.

Freire, Paulo. *Education for Critical Consciousness.* Translated by the Center for the Study of Development and Social Change. New York: Continuum, 1974.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary Edition.* Translated by Myra Berman Ramos. New York: Continuum, 2006.

Gaddis, John Lewis. *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War, Revised and Expanded Edition.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Gott, Richard. *Cuba: A New History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.
Guevara, Ernesto "Che." *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolution.* New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968.

Hammond, Paul Y. *Cold War and Détente: The American Foreign Policy Process Since 1945*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1975.

Hanemann, Ulrike. "Nicaragua's Literacy Campaign." *UNESCO.* Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Education, 2005.

Hirshon, Sheryl and Judy Butler. *And Also Teach Them to Read.* Westport: Lawrence Hill & Company, 1983.

Hodges, Donald C. *Intellectual Foundations of the Nicaraguan Revolution.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986.

Judson, Fred. "Sandinista Revolutionary Morale." *Latin American Perspectives* (1987): 19-42.

Kirkendall, Andrew J. *Paulo Freire & the Cold War Politics of Literacy.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010.

Kozol, Jonathan. *Children of the Revolution: A Yankee Teacher in the Cuban Schools.* New York: Delacorte Press, 1978.

Leiner, Marvin. "The 1961 National Cuban Literacy Campaign." in *National Literacy Campaigns: Historical and Comparative Perspectives,* Edited by Robert F. Arnove and Harvey J. Graff, 173-196. New York: Plenum Press, 1987.

Lorenza, Ana. "Report on Method and Means Utilized in Cuba to Eliminate Illiteracy." UNESCO, 1969.

Lutjens, Sheryl L. "Women, Education, and the State in Cuba" in *Latin American Education: Comparative Perspectives* ed. by Carlos Alberto Torres and Adriana Puiggros, 289-319. Boulder: Westview Press, 1997.

MacDonald, Theodore. *Making a New People: Education in Revolutionary Cuba.* Vancouver: New Star Books, Ltd., 1985.

Mayo, Peter. "Nicaragua's Pedagogical Effort 30 Years On." *Truthout.* October 30, 2010.

Miller, Valerie. *Between Struggle and Hope: The Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade.* Boulder: Westview, 1985.

Paolucci, Gabriella. "Sartre's Humanism and the Cuban Revolution." *Theory and Society* 36 (2007): 245-263.

Pastor, Robert A. *Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.

Pérez, Jr., Louis A. *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Perez, Jr., Louis A. *Essays on Cuban History: Historiography and Research.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995.

Prevost, Gary. "Cuba and Nicaragua: A Special Relationship?" *Latin American Perspectives* 17 (1990): 120-137.

Saldaña -Portillo, María Josefina. *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

Smith, Robert Freeman, editor. *Background to Revolution: The Development of Modern Cuba.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966.

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. "2006 UNESCO Literacy Prize winners announced." (June 2006) Retrieved from http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=33384&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html (accessed March 10, 2012).

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics. "Public spending on education, total (% of GDP)." *The World Bank Group* (2012). http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GD.ZS (accessed March 20, 2012).

United States Agency for International Development. *Audit of USAID/ Nicaragua's Education Activities.* San Salvador: USAID, 2008. pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PDACS126.pdf (accessed March 20, 2012).

Walker, Thomas W. *Nicaragua: Living in the Shadow of the Eagle, Fourth Ed.* Boulder: Westview Press, 2003.

Whittlesey, D.S. "Geographic Factors in the Relations of the United States and Cuba." *Geographical Review* 12 (1922).