

CI Lab Notes

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An English-Language Bibliography of the 1961 Cuban Literacy Campaign

By Noah Oluwafemi Samuel and Kate Williams

Speaking at the United Nations in 1960, Fidel Castro declared that Cuba would become in one year “a territory free of illiteracy.” And in 1961 the island nation mobilized in a massive and successful literacy campaign, led by its young people.

We have visited the Museo Nacional de la Campaña de Alfabetización (National Museum of the Literacy Campaign) in Havana, talked with campaign veterans, and used some literature from and about the campaign in research (Williams, 2003) and teaching.

But how easy is it for someone who reads only English to learn about this achievement? What has been published about the campaign in English? We created this bibliography in order to find out. And in the process we found others who have drawn conceptualizations from and about the campaign that will inform our future work on one of today's literacy challenges: computer literacy. This is just one of the ways that the 1961 campaign lives on.

With access to the seventh largest library in the US, we used our university library catalog, the for-profit scholarly journal databases it subscribes to, including Ebsco and Proquest, the non-profit journal database Jstor, and the tools Google Scholar and Google Books. Search phrases included “Cuban literacy campaign” and “literacy Cuba.” We searched dissertation databases using the phrases with and without quotations. We excluded magazine and newspapers. With help from the university's interlibrary loan service we examined the items themselves including their bibliographies and footnotes. We include here 87 scholarly or professional publications: thesis, books and monographs, book chapters, journal articles, papers in conference proceedings, and two films. Four useful bibliographies are on this list, and the website accompanying the recent film *Maestra / Teacher* includes a bibliography and teaching materials. A 1981 issue of *Journal of Reading* titled “Education in Cuba: 1961–1981. A Special Issue Commemorating the 20th Anniversary of Cuba's National Literacy Campaign is of particular importance; see Martuza; Leiner; Prieto; Mujica; “Glossary;” Canflux; and Martuza and Prieto.

Some of the items here focus solely on the campaign; many are comparative case studies. Others use the campaign as a starting point or context for examining something else. Still others mention the campaign relatively briefly. We include them all in order to see the campaign and the many ways English speakers have thought about it. While the US has been isolated from Cuba and vice versa, this remarkable campaign was not isolated in the writings of scholars and professionals. Moreover, the number of publications per decade (seven in the 1960s, five/1970s, 22/1980s, 144/1990s, 20/2000s, 19/2010s thus far) suggest that the literacy campaign has a place in our scholarly record and attracts sustained interest. We also hope this bibliography will help North Americans understand the intellectual heritage of the better known work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Friere: Cuba's literacy campaign and Friere's comrade, teacher Raúl Ferrer.



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