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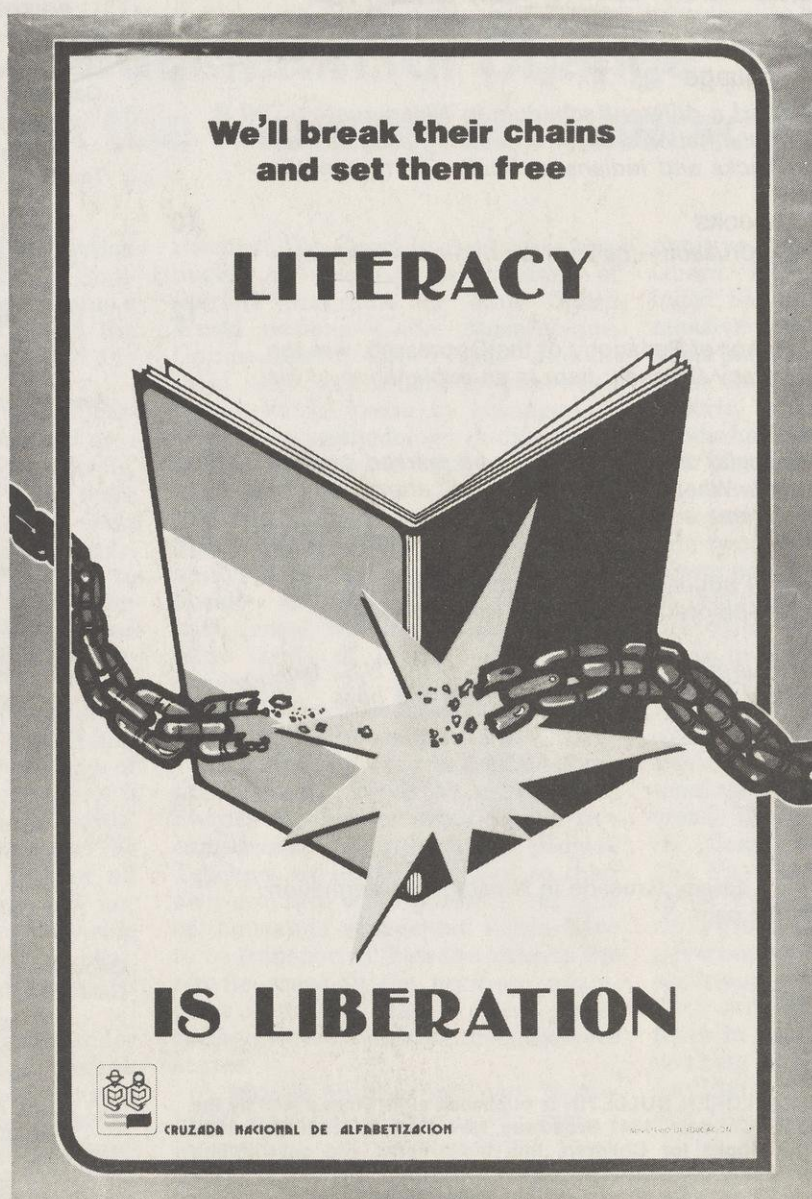
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INTERRACIAL BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

# BULLETIN

VOLUME 12, NUMBER 2, 1981 ISSN 0146-5562



## Literacy Crusade in Nicaragua: A Report

COOPERATIVE CHILDREN'S BOOK CENTER  
600 North Park, Madison, Wisconsin 53706



# BULLETIN

VOLUME 12, NUMBER 2

1981

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ERIC IRCD

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In view of *Bulletin* readers' interest in innovative teaching and in learning materials to achieve liberation, we devote this special issue to the Literacy Crusade in Nicaragua. This historic campaign was launched a year ago, and its first phase has just drawn to a close.

The Nicaraguan Crusade was based on the literacy work of Paulo Freire, author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. This issue includes a review of Freire's teaching methods, which have been used with success in Brazil, Cuba, Guinea-

Bissau and Cape Verde.

Reports on the following pages are based in part on the experiences last December of two CIBC officers who joined the first U.S. tour group to Nicaragua since the Revolution. (Another CIBC officer had visited Nicaragua last summer.) Two members of the *Bulletin's* editorial board who—like many other U.S. educators—have been applying Freire's approaches to their own classrooms, also contributed to this issue.

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*During the past year, 110,000 literacy teachers—many of them high school and college students—taught Nicaragua's half million illiterates to read and write. This is an account of the campaign*

## Education for Change: A Report on the Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade

Close on the heels of the Revolution that in 1979 toppled 45 years of Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua came a second revolution. It was called the "Second War of Liberation" and the "cultural insurrection."

As in other Latin American dictatorships, illiteracy had been used as a tool to keep the *campesinos* docile, unquestioning, unaware that there are alternatives, that control of their destiny is possible. Nicaragua's system of education had been geared to the interests of the ruling elite, offering literacy and advancement to those who would serve and uphold the status quo.

The women and men who took up arms against the Somoza regime had as their goal not just the overthrow of a government, but the liberation of a people—and after victory in battle, the next priority was literacy. At the time of Somoza's defeat, half of all Nicaraguans could neither read nor write. In rural areas the illiteracy rate was estimated at 75 to 80 per cent, and, for women in many villages, 100 per cent.

Plans for a Literacy Crusade, under the direction of Fernando Cardenal, began five weeks after the new government took control. The Literacy Crusade's goal was to bring functional literacy—reading at the third grade level—to 50 per cent of the population, or as many as could be

reached. The Crusade organizers conducted an extensive examination of literacy programs in other Third World nations—Cuba, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde—and invited the internationally renowned expert Paulo Freire to Managua to consult on methodology (a discussion of Freire's methods appears on page 12).

While method and content were being planned (see page 10 for an analysis of the primers and workbooks), a village-by-village nationwide census was carried out to determine levels of literacy in each of Nicaragua's 16 provinces. Efforts were also made to ascertain the availability of volunteer teachers.

Influenced by Freire's methodology, the planners hoped to provide one literacy teacher for every four or five *campesinos* (poor country people). Teachers would be assigned to their own province when possible, but tens of thousands of teachers would have to be transported from the cities to the remote areas in the northern mountains and the Atlantic Coast forest regions where available teachers were scarce.

A serious problem was how to mobilize national resources for such a large-scale campaign without interfering with production. During the Revolution, entire sections of Nicaragua's cities had been destroyed by the

punitive bombings of the National Guard. Before Somoza fled, he pillaged the national treasury and left massive debts which the new government pledged to honor. Money to pay these debts had to be earned from exports, which meant production of goods had to be increased.

A clever solution was arrived at. Those who volunteered to work in the Literacy Crusade would be divided into two groups. One would consist of young people not yet actively engaged in productive work, who would leave the cities and live with the *campesinos* in the rural areas and mountains for a period of five months. They would give classes in the evenings and by day they would work in the fields, planting crops, harvesting, tending animals and helping to increase the nation's productive capacity. These volunteers would comprise the Popular Literacy Army (EPA), better known as *brigadistas*. The second group would be factory workers, government workers, housewives and professionals who would remain at their regular work in the cities and teach in the urban *barrios* during non-working hours. These were the Popular Literacy Teachers, called "popular alphabetizers (AP)."

The volunteers for the *brigadistas* were young people—high school and college students primarily, although some were as young as twelve. Sev-



eral reasons account for the youthfulness of the *brigadistas*. For one thing, many had fought in the Revolution and were committed to its goals. (A striking aspect of the Nicaraguan Revolution had been the youth of the liberation fighters—teenagers, or younger.)

In addition, the government made specific efforts to enlist young people in order to raise their consciousness about the realities of the poverty and oppression of the *campesinos* in the rural and mountain areas. (Most of the *brigadistas* were from urban areas, and while illiteracy was high there, it was far, far higher in the country.)

The *brigadistas* were the political descendants of the "Choir of Angels"—children who had formed part of Augusto César Sandino's guerrilla army during the struggle to oust the occupying U.S. Marines in the 1930's. The "Choir" worked to "alphabetize" the *campesinos* in the mountainous provinces of Matagalpa, Jinotega and Nueva Segovia, so that they could read Sandino's literature. In the 1960's this same area became the base for the Sandinista forces—nationalists who derived their names and inspiration from Sandino.

#### Parental Permission Required

Parental permission was a requisite for minors who wished to join the *brigadistas*. The Crusade organizers found that they faced opposition from some middle-class parents who were not supportive of the Revolution and who, in addition, had traditional parental worries about their children, particularly their daughters. (Working class parents were not, in general, antagonistic.)

Parent hostility was met by widespread discussions about their concerns. Campaign representatives held weekly meetings in the schools with parents and students. Posters, newspaper articles and TV and radio programs addressed the issues. To allay some of the parents' fears, it was decided to organize single-sex brigades, and young girls would be accompanied by their teachers and live in dormitories, farmhouses, public buildings or schoolrooms. Boys and older girls would live in the homes of the *campesinos*. It is worth noting that children from middle-class homes—who joined the Crusade for a variety of reasons—usually became committed to the goals of the new

## ABOUT THE

When you have good boots, a strong hammock, a mosquito net, purified water, new pants and shirt and enough food, then, I suppose, it is merely heroic to put up with no toilets, mosquito bites all day long, a plentiful and vicious tick population, plus a three to seven day walk to the nearest doctor, priest or shower. The fact is that most *brigadistas* started with NO boots, NO bedding, NO mosquito nets, NO purified water—and, worst of all, very little food. For the *brigadistas* that meant serious health problems such as malaria, diarrhea and physical exhaustion from systems weakened by poor diet and poisoned by mosquito and tick bites. I have seen faces burned and re-burned, unaccustomed to prolonged exposure to the sun, lips blackened with fever blisters, arms bumpy and peeling from insect bites . . . one weeps—but they carry on! The international aid has finally arrived so now most *brigadistas* have their basic supplies, but at the start they had a painful baptism into the hardships of peasant life. —Based on a report from John McFadden, a California State University professor who has been living in Nicaragua as consultant to the teacher-training division of the Literacy Crusade.

Felix Vijil, who was only eleven years old, had to lie about his age to join the crusade. "I infiltrated into one of the brigades," the youngster explained. Wearing an army cap adorned with a literacy button and a Sandinista National Liberation Front pin, he recalled his days with the campaign.

The youngest of three children, Felix grew up in a home with six servants during Somoza's reign. (Under the Sandinistas, the number has dropped to two.) His father is Miguel Vijil, an engineer and the minister of housing in Nicaragua. Felix and his two sisters left home to join the crusade alongside youths from the poorest of families.

Felix was assigned to San Rafael del Sur, a coastal town about an hour's drive from Managua. There he lived with a peasant family in a thatch-roofed hut on poles. His main work consisted of hauling water from a well and planting and grinding corn. He found he was too small to help in the town mining operation, which involved hauling 75-pound blocks of lime.

During two-hour sessions in the morning and afternoon, Felix conducted literacy classes for the seven people in his peasant family. The youngest was seventeen, the oldest sixty-two.

Midway through the crusade, Felix went home to recover from a bad case of fleas and worms that he had picked up living with the peasants. But he returned in 15 days to continue his literacy work.

For Felix himself, the crusade was a rite of passage. "When we left, we were just a bunch of little kids who didn't know anything," said the eleven-year-old. "Now we are mature." —From the newspaper report, "Nicaragua's Literacy Campaign, a Testament to Youth" by Huntly Collins, appearing in *The Oregonian*, September 21, 1980.



At the Plaza of the Revolution in Managua, 95,000 *brigadistas* are welcomed by a half million Nicaraguans on August 23, 1980, after an absence of five months.



# BRIGADISTAS



Susan E. Dorfman

At left, brigadista Isabel C. Quintana, whose report appears below.

I have a family background of commitment to the Sandinista movement. As a child I remember vividly my grandfather's words of praise for the liberation struggle led by Sandino to get the U.S. occupation troops out of Nicaragua. There was much rejoicing in my home when Sandino won and the U.S. troops left. But all this celebrating stopped when Sandino was assassinated by Somoza.

You hear more about *brigadistas* who went to alphabetize people in the mountains. Let me tell you a little about the others who stayed in the cities and became *alfabetizadores públicos*. They went into the *barrios* of the city for the same amount of time that we did—five months—but it wasn't as glamorous. My father was one of these. He would go after work into one of the hundreds of *barrios* in Estelí. He spent two to three hours every night with the same families, teaching them from the same primers we used with *campesinos* in the mountains.

My younger brother was an *alfabetizador público*, too. My parents didn't know what he was doing at first. He was amazing! Each morning he would leave home, but instead of going to his regular school he went to *la escuela de alfabetización*. He lied about his age. My parents didn't find out about his going there for two weeks—they thought he was going to his regular school—and by then the teachers of *la escuela de alfabetización* thought my brother was so good, they persuaded my parents to let him stay. He was assigned to a *barrio* near his home, and every afternoon after his regular school, he would go to that *barrio* and work with the poor people of the city. He used the same primer with them that my father and I did.

I was assigned to an area near Estelí. There were 54 houses there, none close together but all within walking distance of each other. Four other *brigadistas* and I lived with different families, and we were each responsible for teaching six or seven people. It took a full week before I felt the people I was with respected me enough to start the study periods. Before we could teach we worked along with the families, cooking, cleaning the floors and washing clothes in the river, and working in the fields with a machete to cut the cane. The study periods I conducted were always in the evening, after the day's work and after supper. The study periods lasted two hours. Each *brigadista* came with a lamp, and while there was no electricity and few families could afford lamps, the ones we brought made it possible to work late at night. At the end of the crusade, 40 people in our area could read and write. I was successful with six out of my seven students. —Isabel C. Quintana, Managua.

The Field Diary was used by the *brigadistas* to register their daily experiences and their thoughts. In a sense, they were work diaries. At the weekly Saturday regional workshops these diaries were discussed collectively as a way of finding concrete answers to problems arising in the process of *alfabetización*.

Continued on page 6

society Nicaragua is trying to build.

Initial preparations lasted six months. The Literacy Crusade first launched a pilot project in the same northern provinces where the Sandinistas had originally made their base. Undertaken by the 80-member Patria Libre brigade, its objective was to test a training design and gain practical experience that would later be transmitted to the other *brigadistas*. The group members also underwent physical training to prepare them for the arduous tasks ahead.

After completing the pilot project, each of the 80 members of the Patria Libre conducted workshops and trained 560 more teachers. These, in turn, trained 7,000 teachers. For the final phase, which ended in March, 1980, schools and colleges were closed early, releasing thousands of volunteer students for additional training. By the conclusion of the last phase of training, a grand total of 95,000 "alphabetizers" were prepared for the campaign. Of these, 60,000 were the young *brigadistas* who would work and teach in the countryside. The other 35,000 were the "popular alphabetizers," adults for the most part, who remained in the cities to work in the *barrios*.

## Groups Support Crusade

The Nicaraguan Revolution had been successful in large part because of the involvement of people's organizations that had formed in the years preceding 1978. Some of these were the National Union of Teachers, the Sandinista Trade Union Federation, the Organization of Nicaraguan Women, the block- and street-based Sandinista Defense Committee and the Association of Rural Workers. The same groups now provided the Literacy Crusade with massive logistical support, transporting 60,000 *brigadistas* from the cities to the countryside, supplying them with food, medical care, textbooks, etc. They also provided protection; security was a major concern, because remnants of Somoza's National Guard, which had fled into the mountains on the Honduras border, threatened that the *brigadistas* would be killed.

On March 24 of last year, truck convoys by the thousands left the cities of Managua, Estelí, León, Granada and Matagalpa and fanned out to all of Nicaragua's provinces. Because of the terrain, thousands of



*brigadistas* had to march by foot. Some traveled by boat, some by helicopter. Each *brigadista* was eventually outfitted with jeans, a gray tunic, a mosquito net, a hammock, a lantern by which to teach at night and a portable blackboard. On *brigadista* arrival day, a special service was held in every church of every denomination to greet the *brigadistas* and to launch the Crusade.

From the end of March until mid-August, the *brigadistas* followed roughly this pattern: by day, work in the fields with the *campesinos* they lived with or chores around the house; by night, two hours of instruction with from five to seven *campesinos* huddled around a gas lamp. On Saturday, there were workshops with other *brigadistas*—usually 30 in number from the same village or a village nearby—to evaluate the week's work, discuss common problems and plan the week ahead. For those *brigadistas* who could not meet together because of distance, all-day Saturday radio programs informed them of news of the campaign and offered advice and encouragement. In the cities, the popular alphabetizers worked at their regular jobs and, in addition, gave two hours of instruction at night; they also had Saturday workshops. Within this general pattern, there were wide variations, as indicated by the experiences of individual *brigadistas* recounted on the accompanying pages.

The campaign took its toll: 56 *brigadistas* died during the Crusade. Six were murdered by the National Guard, the rest were killed by acci-

*The campaign brought Nicaragua's illiteracy rate from 52 per cent to 13 per cent. Reading and writing were only part of the campaign's total impact.*



Larry Boyd/LNS

## Continued from page 5

Many *brigadistas* mention that when they read their own diaries at the end of the campaign, they laughed at their early perceptions of the community they were working in, their people. Their comments indicate how important the diaries have been in helping the *brigadistas* reflect on their own conscientization.

During the campaign's first two weeks the only thing one *brigadista* wrote in her diary about her teaching experience was that "these five adults that I have to teach are never going to learn." At the end of the diary, there are five letters from these adults thanking her for teaching them to read and write.

Another *brigadista* wrote to the Ministry of Education requesting to be exempted from handing in his diary because he wanted to keep it. He wanted to read it to his children—as yet unborn—so that they could understand what their own people were capable of in their first year of Revolution. —From a report by Maria Suarez, who worked in the research division of the Literacy Crusade.

Juan José Guerra Linares, eighteen, is the leader of Escuadra Adolfo Aquirre, a group of 30 young *brigadistas*. They have been teaching peasants in the Department (province) of Chontales, Nicaragua.

Getting the *brigadistas* to their designated students proved to be a difficult task. The underbrush was so thick in some places, and the terrain so treacherous, that eight of his people got lost. Juan learned that he needed a burro to visit the various locations, because the mud was ankle-deep in many places.

The first problem the *brigadistas* had to face was the hard life in the countryside. They were all city kids. They were not accustomed to the rigors of rural life: long hours of work in the fields with their students (who ranged in age from seven to fifty), a diet of rice and tortillas, lack of sanitary facilities, insects (especially mosquitos), and lack of electricity.

The *brigadistas* met all kinds of resistance to their teaching, besides the lack of respect that rural folk had for city dwellers. After 40 years of tyranny from the Somozas, the peasants did not trust anyone connected with any government. They thought that perhaps these young people had been sent as spies and that they might lose their land.

There were other sources of resistance. After a day's work on a meager diet, many were too tired to sit down and study for two hours each day by gas lanterns. Many said they were too old to learn, or could not see any point in learning to read.

The *brigadistas* found ways to break down the resistance and suspicions. Some used the Bible to teach from instead of sticking to the prepared text materials.

But the campaign in Chontales was a success. Not all who were assigned teachers learned how to read and write, but most did. —From a report by David L. Schwartz, Professor of Sociology at Albright College, Reading, Pa., who visited Nicaragua last December.

"I was a snob before I went off to alphabetize; I didn't greet *campesinos* who came into town; I fussed a lot about dressing up and making up my face, and before I put on the new boots the crusade gave me, I filed and painted my toenails. Now that I know people from surrounding valleys, people are always stopping by to say 'hello' and I love it. My old worries just bore me now."

Before the triumph of the revolution, Julia, who made the statement above, measured herself against standards and criteria which were communicated through Spanish-dubbed U.S. TV programs. She looked up to the few families in town who dressed better and lived more comfortably than her own family, and she was among those young Nicaraguans who joined the crusade as a favor to the country. She was without enthusiasm.

Julia now knows personally how most Nicaraguans live; she spent five months eating beans and tortillas, sleeping with fleas, getting up at 5 a.m., sharing a bedroom with a whole family, hiking for miles through mud and rocks and living without the convenience of even an outhouse. She knows lots of once illiterate people whom she regards as far more talented and intelligent than herself: the student in her class who learned to read in two months, or the one her own age who listened to the radio so carefully and consistently that he (who couldn't even



read a newspaper) shamed her (who never bothered to read) with his knowledge of world politics.

Julia now knows a man who has an almost endless repertoire of songs he composed himself, songs which no one had ever written down. She knows another illiterate man who designed his house with the applied science of a professional architect, a man who knows more physics than most college graduates and who, exploiting the laws of gravity, built the only house in the valley with running water. But Julia also knows a child, who, old enough to know better, asked her if cars ate grass. Knowing this wasting human potential by name, knowing Luisa, Leopolda, Chuno, Pedro and Antonia by name, makes her old worries trivial to her now. —From a report by Beverly Treuman, a North American who participated in the Literacy Crusade.

Now, the idea of "Revolutionary Priests" might seem foreign to some . . . but today, throughout Latin America, Christians are stepping forward to oppose the dictatorships that rule most of the countries throughout Central and South America.

Between 1964 and 1978, 978 priests, nuns, and bishops of the Catholic Church were arrested throughout Latin America. That's almost 1,000! Seventy-three were tortured, 78 killed, and 37 disappeared or were kidnapped.

Church people are saying that God did not intend for human beings who are His children to suffer and to die when the lands about them are abundant with the materials and the wealth to feed and to clothe all of the people, if only they were shared equitably. That vision that the Church has developed of what life might be like now for its people, rather than a vision of heaven when they die, has now led the Church to involve itself in direct political activity, and which has also often led Church people to Socialist economics.

Today in Nicaragua, they believe that they have found a model: a model of Christians and Socialists working together, a model that they believe will be duplicated throughout Latin America.

When I asked Father Ernesto Cardenal [a Diocesan Priest who is Minister of Culture] if in Nicaragua they were in fact creating the Kingdom of God on earth, he paused and then said: "No, not creating the Kingdom but getting closer!" —From a report by the Reverend Philip Zwerling, Minister of the Unitarian Church of Los Angeles, who visited Nicaragua last year.

Nestor, serious and intense, is twenty years old and a student at The University of Central America, studying chemical engineering. His family is lower middle class.

He was active in the fighting of the Revolution, though not as active as his older brother (who also survived) or his cousin (who was killed by the National Guard). He participated in and witnessed a great deal of killing and destruction and saw many of his friends die. He tries not to think of the experience too much, but he's extremely proud of what he did.

One evening during the fighting the National Guard came to all the houses in his neighborhood and removed all the young people between the ages of eleven and twenty-five. They told the parents that since all the young people were part of the Revolution, they would all be taken to jail until the fighting was over. That night the National Guard shot all these children and publicly cremated their bodies. Nestor's mother had been warned about the roundup and managed to get him, his brother and his young sister out of the house beforehand, but he witnessed the cremation. Those killed included his cousin and many of his friends.

After the victory, Nestor became active in the Literacy Crusade. He "alphabetized" many people in a small village near Matagalpa. He found the children were easy to teach, but that many adults claimed to be too old to learn. Still, he found the experience extremely rewarding, and felt he learned as much from the peasants as they learned from him. —Based on an interview with Sevilla Fonseca, *brigadista* from the village of Kumusaca in the Department of Chontales. It was one of several interviews with *brigadistas* conducted by a U.S. visitors' team sponsored in December, 1980, by the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA).

Sarah Plant and John Gordon/LNS



130,000 portable blackboards, like the one above, were donated to the campaign by the nation of Colombia.

dents and illness. Today, the murdered youth are hailed by Nicaraguans as martyred heroes, and their faces are enshrined on posters and paintings hung everywhere.

The campaign itself was extremely successful. At its end, some 500,000 *campesinos* were no longer illiterate, and the rate of illiteracy was down from a national average of 52 per cent to just under 13 per cent. Confirming the statistics are the documented exams and the simple sentences that all *campesinos* had to write at the end of the five-month learning period. As important as the literacy they gained, however, was their new awareness of themselves and of their significance to the nation. Prior to the Revolution, *campesinos* had been considered of little or no consequence; but this campaign, a major indication of positive governmental concern, contributed to a new sense of dignity and self worth.

The influence of the crusade on the *brigadistas* and other "alphabetizers" was also dramatic. They gained a new understanding and respect for the rural poor—and often, as noted, a new commitment to the goals of the Revolution. Participants also learned a variety of skills—life skills as well as teaching skills. All gained a more profound understanding of their nation—and learned that they could play a role in creating a new society. □

A report on the Literacy Crusade in the Bluefields region—and information about the area—begins on the next page.



*The Literacy Crusade followed a different schedule in Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast region, where the nation's Black and Indian peoples live. The Crusade is providing Blacks and Indians instruction in their native languages for the first time*

## English: An Oppressed Language

A gigantic billboard seen throughout Nicaragua depicts the sun rising over the black silhouette of mountains. It reads, "The Atlantic Coast: The Awakening Giant."

The Atlantic Coast region is isolated from the rest of Nicaragua by mountains and dense forests—and by a very different history. Taking up nearly half the area of Nicaragua, it has only about 12 per cent of the population, but it contains most of the nation's racial minorities—Blacks and Miskito, Rama and Suma Indians. The official language of the region is Spanish—it is the language of instruction in the schools, for example—but the indigenous languages are English and several Indian languages, plus a number of dialects; the area is, in effect, bilingual. (While some parochial schools used to teach English-speaking children in their native tongue, Somoza outlawed that practice ten years ago and decreed that Spanish be used exclusively.) Spanish is considered the dominant culture, and Spanish influences from the Pacific Coast have long been seen as oppressive.

The major seaport on Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast is Bluefields. Its stores are owned by Spanish-speaking settlers from the relatively wealthier Pacific Coast region, but the town is 60 per cent English-speaking and 50 per cent poor Black. The widespread use of English is due to Britain's having annexed the region in the 16th century when attempts were made to establish British settlements there. The British were unsuccessful in their colonizing attempt, but English is still spoken in the area. (The British also made alliances with the Indians in the area and encouraged

### A Request from Bluefields

"Before the revolution, the library had a handful of books; the librarian had no training at all; and if you wanted to borrow a book, you had to leave a deposit of the value of the book. Only the elite of Bluefields could afford that!

"After the Revolution, I applied to the Minister of Culture to start an art school in Bluefields. They said, why not become the librarian and run the art school as part of the library? The condition was that I take a course at the University in Nicaragua in library science, and I did.

"The library pays no rent or taxes, and there is no charge to borrow books now. My salary is 3,000 cordovas (\$300 U.S.) a month. Of that, the federal government pays 1,200 cordovas (\$120), the rest Bluefields pays. But I have no budget to buy books, so I take whatever books I can get. In a year and a half I have collected 5,000 books, all donated.

"We don't have any books for the Black children here. Can you help us get children's books that I hear have been published in your country? They are so necessary."—June Beer, Librarian.

NOTE: Irving and Evelyn Wolfe at 26 Dogwood Ave., Pomona, N.Y. 10970 have volunteered to ship books to the Bluefields Library. Persons willing to donate books on any subject, but particularly non-racist, non-sexist children's books, are asked to send them to the Wolfes at the above address, or send books directly to June Beer, Public Library, Bluefields, Nicaragua.

them to fight the Spaniards. This Indian-Spanish hostility remains to this day.)

There are conflicting accounts as to how Blacks came to the area. One account tells of the British coming in 1630 with a shipload of Black slaves to set up cane and indigo plantations. Another tells of a British slave ship bound for Jamaica shipwrecked on the Nicaraguan coast, and the slaves escaping along the coast. Just how the Blacks came is uncertain, but there was considerable mixing between them and the Indians—and it was their descendants who became the Miskitos of today.

The people of the Atlantic Coast region are mostly Catholic, but there is a substantial population of Moravians and Baptists and other fundamentalists, missions for the most part from the U.S. Most of the Catholic missionaries are Franciscans and Capuchins, who have been strong supporters of the Revolution.

The Atlantic Coast region did not become part of Nicaragua until 1895, and that occurred without consultation with the region's indigenous peoples. Ensuing governments, run by Spanish-speaking peoples from the Pacific Coast region, followed the classic pattern of ethnocentrism and cultural domination. There is a growing recognition that the new government of Nicaragua is showing concern for the people on the Atlantic Coast. But there are discontents, and the region's history of abuse is readily exploitable by interests unsympathetic to a new Nicaragua.

The Somoza dictatorship followed a deliberate policy of underdeveloping the Atlantic Coast. From the more



industrialized Pacific Coast region—with all the principal urban centers—to Bluefields, there was only one road that reached only partway; the rest of the journey had to be done by river boat through dense forests. Many believe that the Somoza policy of limiting communication was done to isolate Nicaragua's racial minorities—and to keep the area as a private preserve for his own financial interests. (His family company held a monopoly on the fishing and shrimp industry there.)

The history of the region is encased in mystery, because available records are scarce, and there has been a conscious apathy about making archaeological and historical explorations. Prior to the Revolution, no census had ever been taken here; the census taken for the Literacy Crusade, which only scratched the surface, provided conflicting data. However, the Reconstruction Government is committed to making up for past neglect. In the year and a half since the overthrow of Somoza, more projects to aid the region have been undertaken than were attempted in the previous half century. For the first time, for example, telephone, TV and a new road now under construction are bringing the Atlantic and Pacific Coast regions closer together.

All of the *brigadistas* of the Literacy Crusade (see page 3) had a secondary function: to search for artifacts, to record legends, songs and folklore of different areas, to collect samples of local flora and fauna and to mount preventative health programs. On the Atlantic Coast these subsidiary activities—still in progress at this writing—have taken on special significance since the introduction of telephones, radio and TV—and the fact that new roads are being built from the Atlantic to the Pacific coasts—will undoubtedly bring rapid change to the region.

Religious groups in the area have been very supportive of the Literacy Crusade. While an ecumenical drive in 1979 collected funds to support the Atlantic Coast Literacy Crusade, the Catholic priests have done the most to follow it up. A Jesuit priest in Bluefields, for example, has launched a program to collect and distribute basic library packets—each consisting of 12 books and 25 pamphlets (all subjects)—to 400 villages in the region as catalysts for community libraries. The same priest, who is writing the



Larry Boyd/LNS

first history of the Atlantic Coast region, is also developing a project for publishing simple books that will help prepare children for a new society.

The policy of the Reconstruction Government is to respect racial and linguistic diversity; of special significance is the Bilingual and Bicultural Act, which officially recognizes English and the Miskito and Suma languages. Literacy crusades in these languages followed a different timetable from the Spanish Crusade in the Central and Pacific Coast regions. Programs with English and Miskito adaptations of the primers and work-

books (see page 10) were launched on the Atlantic Coast last November and are now in progress. The primers and workbooks are just now being translated into the Suma language. The new government policy also seeks to involve Blacks and Indians in the decision-making process. MISURASATA—an acronym meaning Miskito, Suma, Rama, Sandinista All Together—is the first association in modern history of indigenous peoples on the Atlantic Coast region. It makes all the more important decisions for the Literacy Crusade affecting Indian peoples. □

### What Next?

*Sustentimiento* is the follow-up program designed to continue the adult education initiated by the Literacy Crusade. (New schools are being built for the education of children—see page 15.) This program, initiated before the Crusade actually ended and now in progress, is to insure that the *campesinos* would not slip back into illiteracy once the five-month Crusade was over. The program is carried out by the Popular Education Collectives (CEPs).

*Brigadistas* selected the most advanced adult in each Crusade literacy class as CEP coordinator. Specially prepared workbooks and easy-reading booklets had been prepared for the *Sustentimiento*, and the *brigadistas* were able to prepare the coordinators by instructing them in the use of these materials. Flexibility would be a key to the success of the CEPs, and classes were designed to allow participants to enter and leave because of work and family commitments. Once a week the CEP coordinator meets with a regional teacher to evaluate the week's work and to plan for the next week. Each regional coordinator is responsible to five families.

Two radio programs, one at five in the morning and one at six in the evening, serve as further teaching aids. Three times a week these programs broadcast reviews of lessons appearing in the *cartilla*, or literacy manual, and two programs a week offer math lessons.



*The basic tool of the Literacy Crusade—the cartilla or primer-workbook—is examined*

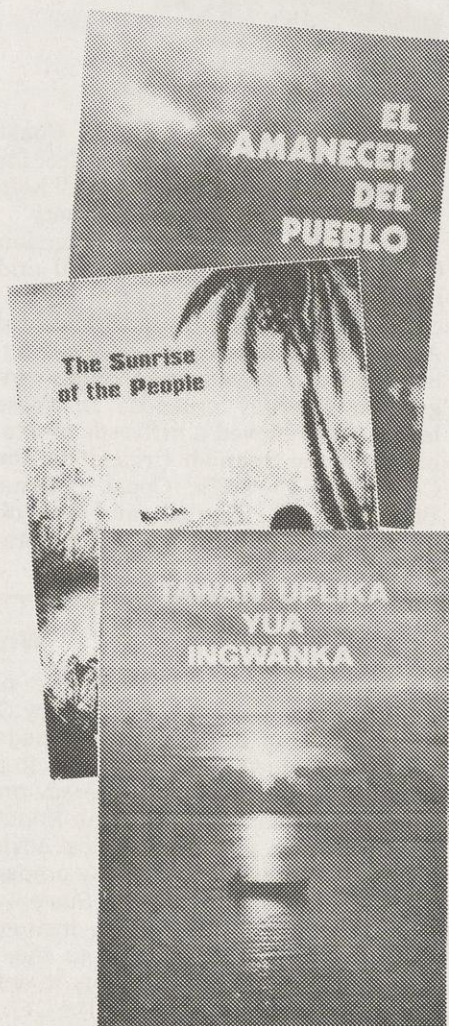
## A Look at the Primer-Workbooks

The basic tool of the Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade is the *cartilla*, a primer-workbook, and it is appropriately titled, "The Sunrise of the People." One million copies were used during the Crusade.

The *cartilla* contains 23 lessons, each one on a theme related to the Reconstruction and its implementation. Each lesson is introduced by a photograph selected on the basis of two criteria: first, that it depict a real life situation familiar to the learners and, second, that it lend itself to a wide ranging discussion on the theme of the lesson. This discussion, or "dialog" as it is called in the *cartilla*, is critically important to the instruction process, and a chief function of the teacher is to engage learners in this dialog. Indeed, strategies to generate discussion were an all-important part of the training programs that preceded the Crusade.

The following is taken directly from the English edition of the teacher's guide for the Atlantic Coast region, pages 26 and 27, that accompanies the *cartilla*:

1. Try to establish a dialog which will permit us to
  - a. Discover the experiences of the learners about the theme represented by the picture.
  - b. Clarify the way people are thinking.
  - c. Encourage the learners to talk, to participate as much as possible.
2. To carry on the dialog try to follow these steps.
  - a. Ask the learners to describe the picture.
  - b. Help them analyze the picture. For this purpose we must ask questions which increase their interest in the theme and which allow a deeper understanding of the issue being discussed.



*The cartilla or primer-workbook is shown here in its three editions: Spanish, English and Miskito Indian. A comparison of their content shows a deliberate attempt to make primers relevant to the interests and needs of the different racial groups.*

The questions should lead the learners to a discussion of their own experiences with the issues raised by the picture and the theme. It is all right to explain something ("social salary," for example), but immediately get the learners talking about the subject again through questions or by encouraging them to break into your explanation.

3. Summarize the ideas and conclusions which have come out in the dialog.

NOTE: Carry out the dialog using the three stages described above, using between 15 and 30 minutes.

This preliminary dialog reaffirms the oral tradition of the people; it also encourages them to express what they understand their reality to be and to consider alternatives to that reality.

Immediately following the dialog, the structured part of the lesson begins. A "topic sentence" which relates to the discussion theme is introduced.

The key sentence of each lesson, in synthesising the political message of the photograph, is tremendously important from a teaching point of view. If the illiterate learner recognises the letters and words and associates them clearly with the discussion themes the words will cease to be meaningless arrangements of shapes and take on instead a direct association with concepts which the learner feels strongly committed to. Each of the sentences contains a key word—what Freire calls the "generative" word. But where Freire builds a sentence from his generative word, the Nicaraguans extract the generative word from an already formulated sentence. Syllables are extracted from the word; and from the sounds which are learnt, the five vowels are combined, the sound and form of each becomes familiar to the learner, and the syllabic families are built up. Once the word has been broken down into its constituent syllables, these are built into new words, and from the



new words the learner constructs simple sentences.\*

Built into the lessons are provisions for practice, reinforcement and application. Each of the sentences is rewritten, dictated and discussed in different contexts. All elements of the lesson and the actual learning materials are relevant to the learners' life and the Revolution. For example, the vowel unit *ee* is taught in the word "free." The apostrophe is taught in the word "people's." At no time is the pedagogy divorced from the learner's life experience or the experience of the Revolution.

In practice, the lesson works like this. The teacher reads the topic sentence and the learners repeat it several times. Next the teacher writes a "key word" from the topic sentence on the blackboard (all *brigadistas* were given a portable blackboard), then repeats it several times, with the learners also repeating it.

Now the teacher says the word at a slower and slower pace, emphasizing a syllable or a special part of the word called the "learning unit." Next the teacher presents on the blackboard a set of new words containing the same learning unit and repeats these several times. One learner is asked to go to the blackboard and select a word; she or he then circles the part of the word that is the same as the learning unit and underlines that part that is different. The other students observe and perform the same operation in their *cartilla* with that one word. They go on to do the same with the rest of the words. (They had been prepared for the writing by learning to write the alphabet, the word "Carlos"—the first name of a major Nicaraguan hero, Carlos Fonseca—and their own names.)

The new words containing the learning unit are also presented in the *cartilla* in dotted lines. Learners are asked to write the words following the dotted lines, then to practice writing the new words on their own, without the aid of the dotted lines. This is done in the workbook.

Several of the words studied are presented within the context of short sentences. These sentences address concerns within the learner's environment (see accompanying sample page). The teacher reads the sentences several times, first slowly, then at a

\*From *The Loss of Fear* by George Black and John Bevon, World University Service, London.

1.- Let's read the sentences.

Work is a right and duty. By work, we will rebuild our country.

2.- Let's read the underlined word several times. Then, read part of the word.

rebuild

rebuild

3.- Listen to these words. Then, read the words with the teacher.

renew

reborn

replant

return

recover

remove

replace

reform

4.- Let's look at these words more carefully. Circle the parts which are the same. Underline the parts which are different.

renew

reborn

replant

return

recover

remove

replace

reform

5.- Let's write these words following the dotted lines. Then, practice writing them without the dotted lines.

renew

replace

recover

return

reform

remove

A sample page from the English primer, "Sunrise of the People."

normal pace. Again the sentences are read, this time with the learners repeating them. The learners can now write the sentences in their workbook.

The first lesson centers on "Sandino, guide of the Revolution." Succeeding lessons deal with contemporary history of the people or with subjects that are important to the development of a new society. Examples are "Work is a right and duty of all our people," "Our democracy is the power of the people organized," "Nica-

raguan women have traditionally been exploited, and the Revolution now makes their liberation possible," "By spending less, saving resources, and increasing production, we consolidate the Revolution" and "With everyone's help we will build playgrounds for our children."

A two- or three-page simply written essay on each theme appears in the teacher's manual, together with suggested questions for use as discussion starters. □



*The work of Paulo Freire, author of Pedagogy of the Oppressed, was the basis of the Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade; here is an explanation of his methodology*

## About Freire

Two decades have passed since Paulo Freire perfected his 40-hour method for teaching literacy to Brazilian peasants. Despite his spectacular success, he was jailed and then exiled by the Brazilian government because learners were politicized as they became literate. Freire worked in Chile for five years before going on to Harvard; he is now special consultant in education to the World Council of Churches in Geneva. From that base he has directed the use of his method in literacy campaigns for adults in Latin America and Africa. Most recently, he has helped shape Nicaragua's 1980 literacy campaign and was involved in developing the *cartillas* or primers there (see page 10).

The following information about Freire's methodology is excerpted and adapted from "Conscientization: Paulo Freire's Alternative to Teaching" by the Institute of Cultural Action, Geneva, for the Methodist Missionary Society, London.

We often assume that if we teach people, they will "learn"; that if we explain the concepts of writing, they will be able to "read." We also assume that if poor and oppressed people are "taught" to "read," they will have taken the first major step towards throwing off their poverty and oppression.

In Latin America, despite a century of educational programs and despite many adult literacy campaigns, the vast numbers of ignorant and illiterate people are growing, and in most cases they are as oppressed as ever. And many who do learn to "read" remain oppressed as well. There must be a better way.

Professor Paulo Freire, the son of a Brazilian peasant, believes that there



*Part of the Literacy Crusade was to teach basic mathematical skills.*

is. Now widely respected for his theory of political education, his reputation is due to the success of a program for adult literacy tried out and perfected in the early 1960s among some poor Brazilian peasant communities.

As a teacher, Freire found that the inability of illiterate peasants to learn was related to their feelings of fatalism and helplessness. They saw themselves as powerless, as worthless objects. Their only real ambition, remote as it seemed, was to obtain the possessions which to them symbolized success and achievement.

Freire set about creating a process to help the peasants free themselves from this state of powerlessness. The result was his concept of "conscientization," which is somewhat similar to consciousness-raising as it is understood in the U.S.

Freire believed that the first step

was to create self-confidence. He felt that only then would people see their misery as the result of historical factors and the way society is organized—as something they could set about altering.

A basic principle of Freire's methodology is that people learn best as a group, from one another, without the formal "teacher-pupil" relationship. He has tried to create a situation in which people stop being passive objects crammed with information by their teacher. Instead they begin to look critically at their environment and the influence it has on them, and to make their own decisions.

Peasants gather in the presence of a coordinator who shows pictures of everyday scenes or objects for discussion. Every new discussion helps those taking part to stand back from their own situation until finally they see it more critically. For people who have always accepted that the factors affecting their lives are beyond their control, this is an important step forward. Drought, hunger, hard labor and debt to remote employers—all part of a way of life they have believed to be inevitable—now become problems to be studied and reflected upon.

This reflection is the "reading" of reality. And then, according to Freire, comes the will to "write" or create. The construction of a well yielding water where it is needed or the building of a wooden house are conscious acts through which the peasants discover their effectiveness. Having proved that they have the power to change nature, what is to prevent them from transforming other aspects of their life? One of Freire's basic tenets is that there is no neutral edu-



cation—only education to “domesticate” or liberate people. Education is either conditioning to accept the status quo or deconditioning to question and change it. For Freire, education is conscientization—a process of making people aware, through which they learn to “read” (i.e., understand) true reality and to “write” it, which means taking it into their own control. To interpret conscientization as merely a progressive literacy program for peasants is to completely miss the point. It is a totally new alternative to traditional education, where change and learning and experience take on simultaneous and equal roles.

The critical capacity of the pupils grows out of dialogue about meaningful situations in their lives, on which they have insights to contribute. Both teacher and pupils join in seeking truth about relevant problems, while respecting each other’s opinions. The teacher serves as the coordinator of a discussion, while the pupils become participants in a group trying to understand existence in a changing society.

As a basis for the discussions, Freire isolates a minimal core vocabulary touching on life situations of the pupils. The crucial criteria is that *words are chosen for their potential capacity to confront the social, cultural and political reality*. The words should provide mental and emotional stimulation—that is, they should suggest and mean something important.

Carefully prepared pictures showing familiar scenes of life and work are often used as teaching aids. These pictures include objects of nature, such as a tree, and of culture, such as an ax. Thus, vocabulary is built on items that have meaning to the students. Flexibility of the teacher in following the ideas triggered by the pictures is essential.

Though Freire originally built a reading vocabulary from the Brazilian peasants’ own language in each village, the Nicaraguans—in order to pre-package a program to be carried out nation-wide—predetermined the vocabulary for their literacy campaign based upon knowledge of their country and their own revolution.

For Freire, the ability to master a language in no way guarantees effective control of one’s environment and life. “We are all illiterate!” Paulo Freire told his astonished students at Harvard years after leaving Brazil.

As far as he was concerned, his students—who were unable to see through the aims of those who manipulate the U.S. consumer society—had fundamentally no more control over the course of their lives than had Brazilian peasants.

Freire recalls an old peasant, illiterate in the conventional sense, who asked: “If God made the sun for all people and lets the rain fall, why should the earth, which God also created, belong only to the rich?” According to Freire, people with sufficient understanding to ask that type of question have the potential to control the course of their own lives.

Even Freire’s severest critics, such as Peter L. Berger of Rutgers University who questions Freire’s philosophy, concede that his method is very successful. (Berger argues that

the concept of consciousness-raising in itself presupposes that someone’s consciousness—the teacher’s—is higher than others—the learners’—and thus imposes one person’s information and values upon another.)

Readers interested in reading Freire’s works are referred to *Cultural Action for Freedom* (Center for the Study of Development and Social Change, Cambridge, Mass., 1970), *Education for Critical Consciousness* (Seabury, 1974) and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Herder and Herder, 1970). Many people find Freire’s theories difficult to understand. A highly readable 64-page pamphlet by Cynthia Brown explaining Freire’s ideas and describing his work in Brazil is available for \$2.50 from the Alternate Schools Network, 1105 W. Lawrence, Room 210, Chicago, Ill. 60640. □

### **Liberation and Literacy: A Feminist Concern**

It is interesting to note that feminists have found a route to understanding the conditions of their lives that compares to the programs that Freire and his followers have evolved to achieve literacy in Third World nations.

Basic to both the Third World literacy campaigns inspired by Freire and to the feminist movement are “consciousness-raising” and “liberation.” These two words reflect the central questions of oppressed people: What are the realities of our lives? What can I do to change these realities?

An examination of the methodologies practiced in many “feminist classrooms” reveals educational practices that are similar to those developed by Freire.<sup>1</sup> The guiding principle of both systems is anti-authoritarianism. Both methods encourage students to believe in the authenticity, validity and importance of their own experiences, which become the focal point of the educational process. In both cases, the classroom environment is informal and there is peer teaching with meaningful interactions between teachers and learners.

Freire insists that the basic materials and vocabulary of an effective literacy program must be keyed to representations of the students’ daily lives, which is similar to the emphasis on “life materials” in a feminist classroom. Through discussion, students become conscious of how their lives have been controlled by society. The objective is to bring about the awareness they need to control their own lives and, further, to change society.

Essential to feminist education, moreover, is analysis leading to a new interpretation of existing learning materials. Students are encouraged to analyze and criticize the contents of materials by understanding the conditions and culture that shaped the lives of the writers.

In contrast to traditional education, which both Freire and feminist educators believe results in domestication rather than liberation, these new methodologies stress the importance of developing a critical analysis of the realities of one’s life. This is the first step to positive actions that can reshape those realities and result in eventual liberation.—Ruth S. Meyers

<sup>1</sup>Readers wishing to learn more about the “feminist classroom” will be interested in the findings of the meetings held this past summer in Copenhagen, Denmark, where 500 feminist scholars and educators met to discuss women’s studies. A report on the conference will be published in the Spring, 1981 issue of *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, available after April 1 from The Feminist Press, Box 334, Old Westbury, New York 11568 for \$3.50 per copy plus \$1. postage and handling.



*Creative teaching linked to social change has achieved marked success in national literacy campaigns. When teachers in the U.S. attempt to use these same techniques, problems and paradoxes emerge*

## A U.S. Teacher's Dilemma

By Barbara Schram

It has always amazed me that when gifted teachers speak to us about how they engage and excite learners, they speak with one tongue. Although vastly different in formal training, cultural background, class and political point of view, their techniques bear a startling resemblance.

Three books that highlight this paradox for me are *Teacher* by Sylvia Ashton Warner, *Letter to a Teacher* by the School Boys of Barbiani and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire.\* Warner, the prim English school mistress in the New Zealand jungle, the anonymous Italian priest of the town of Barbiani and Paulo Freire, the brilliant revolutionary and teacher, all say that the only teaching that has any meaning to people—and that in fact works—is that which speaks to the inner secrets, hopes, yearnings and aspirations of the learners. All three of these gifted teachers recognize that education encompasses the learner's whole life and must speak to his/her particular situation.

So Warner had her Maori children writing down their secrets on precious bits of paper to be shared or withheld as they chose. The Italian priest

gathered up all the rejected school dropouts of the town and then set them to the task of writing to their former teachers to tell them of the indignities and humiliations they suffered at their hands. Freire, by getting to know the daily lives and aspirations of the peasants he worked with, helped develop generative themes, key words that sparked their emotions and imaginations; the resulting discussions helped them understand the oppression of their ignorance and poverty and were the building blocks for learners to read and write.

Energized as well as overwhelmed by these gifted teachers, I have tried to use their example and techniques in my own classroom teaching at a large urban university. Since I teach human services, my subject is particularly amenable to the introduction of Warner's organic ideas or Freire's generative themes. I teach students about the nature of help, how and why we need it, what kind makes sense and the barriers of stigma and privilege that lie in our path as we seek it out. The first assignment of the term is the "Helpee Paper," in which students are asked to reconstruct a time in their lives when they badly needed help to cope with an overwhelming personal situation. I ask them to talk about the episode and analyze the help they received, telling why it worked or didn't work for them. These papers, and the emotional intensity of the memories of gratitude and rage the episode engendered, become the basis for much of the rest of the term's curriculum.

This device works with checkered success. Most of my students have been taught or programmed to separate intellect from emotion, defining intellectual activity as taking down notes on a professor's lectures or books. They find it hard to take their own or their peers' experiences very seriously—or to read a book that they know they will not be tested on. They enjoy the process of writing the paper and the discussions that flow out of their shared experiences with the human services system. Often, however, they will put studying for a Spanish or math test much higher on their agenda than preparing for a human services class, skipping an occasional session if something *really important* must be done for a "real" course. There is a vague sense that if they are interested and engaged in learning then something must be wrong. Some students are intimidated by the request to share pieces of their lives and pain or to expose their opinions and frustrations about abortion or capital punishment. They see their opinions as personal or as irrelevant to the education process. Few have been taught to argue a position and few are prepared to take on an adversary point of view.

My classes pose an interesting set of dilemmas for everyone. My students are caught between the sense that what we are doing really matters to them and the vague suspicion that none of this will really help them get the job they so badly want. My col-

\*Although it is unlikely that any of these three have met or even read each others' work, their ideas, if not identical, are within a similar vein. Of the three, only Freire's work is part of an articulated political philosophy of social change. The other two teachers decry social injustice but speak little about how it can be overcome. Clearly, this limits their utility to us as change agents, but not as educators.

*Continued on page 16*



# Nicaragua in Brief

United States intervention in Nicaragua has a long history. In the mid-1800's Cornelius Vanderbilt's transit company operated a route across the isthmus with a license from the Nicaraguan government. It was a highly profitable undertaking, and a group of Vanderbilt's competitors attempted to take over the route. Striking a deal with some Nicaraguan supporters of their scheme, they arranged private U.S. support that would help stage a revolution and be repaid with a license to operate the route that would replace Vanderbilt's.

In 1855, William Walker, a California politician, led a group of U.S. mercenaries to Nicaragua, and in the ensuing struggle, Walker wound up as president. He demanded that everyone in Nicaragua learn English and the country join the U.S. as a slave state. (Slavery had been abolished in Nicaragua when the country won its independence from Spain in 1821.) A combined Central American army finally drove Walker and his band of U.S. mercenaries out.

The U.S. then moved to achieve its ends by treaty, seeking to build a canal connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans along the Vanderbilt route that it would own in perpetuity—plus the right in perpetuity to a naval base on the Gulf of Fonseca, which Nicaragua shares with Honduras and El Salvador. (It is this gulf to which Reagan recently sent U.S. Navy advisors to help the repressive government of El Salvador patrol it against "subversion.")

In the late 19th and early 20th century the U.S. and the British tried a variety of schemes to secure control over Nicaragua because of its strategic location and attractiveness as a possible site for the inter-ocean canal. In 1912, when all else had failed, U.S. Marines landed.

It was during the occupation of the Marines that Augusto César Sandino led a popular guerrilla fight against the U.S. troops. For approximately six years he successfully resisted the U.S. Navy and Marines. (It was during this period that U.S. forces in Nicaragua carried out the first mass bombing air attack on a large town in this hemisphere.)

Anticipating Nixon's Vietnamization policy by 30 odd years, the U.S. while fighting Sandino created the Nicara-

guan National Guard, a combined army and national police initially commanded by U.S. military personnel while its officer corps was chosen and trained. When the National Guard was considered ready, the U.S. turned peace-keeping duties over to it and pulled out its troops. The guard's first Nicaraguan commander, chosen and installed by the U.S., was Anastasio "Tacho" Somoza Garcia, who had been a meter-reader for the U.S.-owned electric company and had gained favor by learning English and entertaining Americans.

In 1934, Somoza ordered the assassination of Sandino and in 1936 he became president. Various members of the Somoza family ruled the nation through the next 45 years. Although the presidency has been in the hands of other men for very brief periods, the Somozas maintained power by continuing to hold commanding posts of the National Guard.

The Guard turned Nicaragua into a virtual police state and maintained its power by unrestrained brutality and repression. Growing numbers of young people fought them, and the National Guard resorted to such measures as kidnapping all the children in various villages—between the ages of twelve and seventeen in one village, between nine and eleven in another—and killing them as a warning to other villages. They did the same in the neighborhoods of some principal cities, and in

some mountain villages they annihilated the entire population.

The roots of the revolution which recently toppled President Tachito Somoza date back to Sandino's efforts in the 1920s and 30s. Sandino came to be revered as the national hero of liberation and he was the inspiration for the popular movement—the Sandinista Popular Liberation Front (FSLN)—which became the central force of the revolution. The revolution matured and gained popular support during the 1960s; in the 1970s, it escalated into a mass uprising that finally succeeded in ousting Somoza on July 19, 1979. In the two years of open armed combat during 1978 and 1979, 40,000 Nicaraguans were killed.

Nicaragua is presently governed by a coalition of the country's major factions led by the FSLN. The first major task of the National Reconstruction Government—its correct name—was the Literacy Crusade (see page 3).

## Education

### Pre-Revolution

Of slightly more than 400,000 children of primary school age, 272,000 were registered for school in 1976. Half of all those who registered dropped out by the end of the first year. For every 20 students who entered primary school in the countryside, only one completed all six grades. In urban areas, 50 per cent graduated from primary school. Among children ten to fourteen, the illiteracy rate in rural areas was between 74-92 per cent.

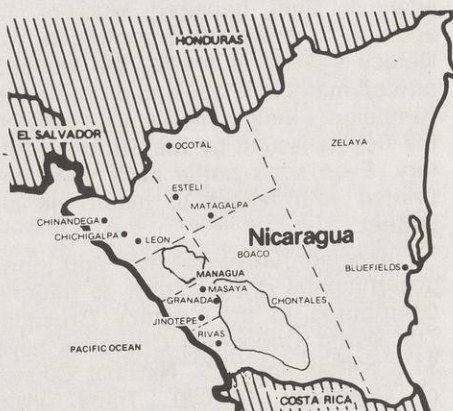
Of the total secondary school age population, classrooms were available for only 18 per cent, and half of these were in private schools.

### Post-Revolution

At the beginning of 1981, primary school enrollment was 515,000. Students in secondary schools numbered 121,637. A total of 1,100 schools are either rebuilt, having been destroyed or damaged during the two years of fighting, are newly constructed or under construction.

The positions of 1,000 "ghost teachers" were filled after the fighting, and at the beginning of 1981, there were 2,250 new teaching positions.

The only cost for education at Nicaragua's two universities is now a minimal



*Nicaragua's population is 2,300,000. Its land area is 50,000 square miles, roughly equivalent to the size of Wisconsin (which many Nicaraguans call their "sister state"). Agriculture accounts for 75 per cent of the nation's economy.*



\$6.50 registration charge. University enrollment has increased from 10,000 to 23,000.

### Libraries

The Somoza National Guard was particularly contemptuous of school libraries, and during the two years of combat, Guardsmen occupied all school buildings in the rebellious cities and deliberately destroyed the libraries. Eighteen months after the Revolution, all schools had been rebuilt and the school libraries restored.

In addition to school libraries, 23 major public libraries are scheduled for construction, of which 14 are in progress. At least one major library is planned for each of Nicaragua's 16 provinces.

Forty librarians are currently undergoing professional training. Additional applicants are to receive their training in foreign countries, principally in schools of library science in Venezuela.

### State of Health

An official government study of the decade between 1966 and 1975 found that 83 per cent of Nicaraguan children suffered from malnutrition at some point in their lives. Only 17 per cent were of normal height and weight for their age.

Prior to 1979, the official figure for life expectancy in Nicaragua was 52. This was computed by counting deaths from two years of age on instead of in the usual way, from day of birth. Actual life expectancy, computed correctly, was 32 years. The very high incidence of infant deaths was the result of widespread malnutrition, disease and lack of hygiene. The conviction among many *campesinos* was that the death of infants was out of their control, being an expression of God's will. This is still the prevalent attitude in impoverished areas of Latin America.

In a very real sense, the literacy campaign is introducing the realization that these deaths are not inevitable. During the 1980 Literacy Crusade, all literacy workers and special health brigades compiled statistics on the diseases, sanitary conditions, health needs, etc. in their area in preparation for a major 1981 health campaign.

### In Brief

**Women:** The Association of Nicaraguan women—AMNLAE—is named after Luisa Amanda Espinosa, the first woman to die in the civil war. She was killed by the National Guard in 1970.

The Association has developed a popular street theater that portrays women's roles and experience in society. . . . Women presently comprise 30 per cent of the army, 50 per cent of the police force. . . . Advertising that exploits the female body in a sexist fashion to sell products is prohibited.

**Prison:** The death penalty has been abolished. The maximum prison sentence is now 30 years.

**Christmas:** To "redeem" Christmas festivities from increasing commercialism and materialism, legislation prohibits advertisements on the radio, business media, or any other publication which use Christmas to promote sales of articles or services. Any business or media agency which violates this law will be subject to a fine of four times the value of the advertisement. Funds collected from these fines will be turned over to the Ministry of Social Well-Being for use in children's programs. . . . Seen in cities and villages of Nicaragua at Christmastime, 1980: police and military personnel making piñatas and distributing them in trucks to children.

**Child Development Centers:** A group of U.S. tourists in December, 1980, visited a pre-school center in Estelí, the city in Nicaragua that underwent the severest destruction from bombings by the National Guard. A tourist remarked that the facilities compared favorably with the day-care centers in the U.S. The remark drew this pained reply from a center worker: "Oh, but this is not a day-care center. This is a child development center."

**Miscellany on the Crusade:** Nicaragua's match box industry traditionally employs sight impaired workers. In addition to providing a contingent for literacy training in braille, the workers printed matchbox labels to promote the campaign. Literacy motifs were also on the tickets issued by the National Lottery. Even soda bottle caps were imprinted with letters to teach the alphabet.

**Financing:** Governmental and non-governmental groups from 35 nations contributed to the Literacy Crusade. The World Council of Churches gave \$1.5 million, the U.S. National Council of Churches, \$60,000. Trade union workers in Sweden donated 50,000 gas lamps for teaching at night in the many areas without electricity. The governments of the U.S., U.S.S.R. and China gave nothing.

**Boxing:** Professional boxing has been outlawed as a sport.

Continued from page 14

leagues are concerned, on the one hand, that too much relevance may be pandering to non-academic matters and, on the other hand, they too decry the deadly effects of student apathy in education. I am caught in the personal and political bind of wanting to share all I know about the nature of oppression in a scant 12 weeks and yet I also know that organic learning is consuming of time and emotion.

### You Cannot Push Students

You cannot push students into a heightened consciousness of the world around them; it is a highly personal process and must proceed for each person at his/her own unique pace. It is also, frankly, much more demanding work to teach this way. I struggle against the limits of my creativity and my impatience at the often uncomprehending façade that has been so well programmed through years of high school. Is the extra work and frustration worth it? Does organic or generative teaching lead to an increase in humanistic and political awareness? My answer is a resounding yes and no. Yes, it is enormously supportive for those young adults already grappling with hard questions about why some people have so much and others so little. My class methods often give them a role model of a process of dialectic struggle, and I hope I hold out for them a vision of a world in which you can fight City Hall and Nestlé and may even win sometimes. For most of the other students much of what we do is probably irrelevant. For a few others it is perhaps a small spot of light in what is often a very dull academic day. But one continues to try to provoke learning that leads to social change because there is no other way. To protect students from contradictions and discomfort is to forge another link in the circle of silence that imprisons us as human service workers in the dual role of oppressed and oppressor. I get very tired, turned off and overwhelmed as all progressive people do in this country. But after a bout of burnout one returns to dialoging with renewed energy. □

### About the Author

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# Resources on Nicaragua

## Solidarity Groups

The source of information about the approximately 50 Nicaragua solidarity groups in different parts of the U.S. is the National Network for Solidarity with the People of Nicaragua (NNSPN). For the address of the solidarity group nearest you, for speakers, information, etc., write the National Network Office, NNSPN, 1322 18th St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

## Casa Nicaragua

There are three organizations called Casa Nicaragua which relate primarily to Nicaraguan communities in the U.S. and provide cultural activities, discussions and information. These are: Casa Nicaragua, 2121 W. Pico Blvd., Los Angeles, Cal. 90006; Casa Nicaragua, 3015 24 St., San Francisco, Cal. 94110; and Casa Nicaragua, 151 W. 19 St., 11th Floor, New York, N.Y. 10011.

## Periodicals

*NACLA Report on the Americas* is the bimonthly magazine of the North American Congress on Latin America. This organization has an international reputation for outstanding research and reporting on social and economic issues in Latin America, especially as they are influenced by U.S. economic interests. In addition to the two excellent issues noted under "Books, Pamphlets, Articles" below, the magazine carries updates on the situation in Nicaragua. Annual subscriptions are \$13. for individuals, \$24. for institutions. Write NACLA, 151 West 19 St., New York, N.Y. 10011.

*National Network Newsletter* is the monthly publication of the NNSPN mentioned above. It provides information about current developments in Nicaragua, news of Nicaragua solidarity groups in U.S., dates of meetings, etc.; it also contains information about El Salvador and Guatemala either omitted or distorted in U.S. media. Annual subscriptions are \$5. in the U.S., \$8. in Canada, \$10. in other countries. See NNSPN address above.

## Books, Pamphlets, Articles

"Crisis in Nicaragua" is an issue of *NACLA Report on the Americas* written at the height of the civil war. This

special issue analyzes (1) how the Somozas retained absolute political power for 45 years; (2) why Nicaragua's private business sector joined the struggle against Somoza; (3) the role of the Sandinista National Liberation Front; and (4) the history of U.S. involvement in Nicaragua and the alternatives it faced at the time. Very exciting reading. The November-December 1978 issue is \$2.50; see address above.

*Look! A New Thing in the Americas! The Church and Revolution in Nicaragua* by Peter Hinde, Order of Carmelites, edited by William Callahan, S.J., published by Quixote Center, P.O. Box 651, Hyattsville, Md. 20782, 1981, \$1. This describes the role of Catholic and Protestant Churches in the Revolution and their role today. Numerous pictures and graphics.

*The Loss of Fear: Education in Nicaragua Before and After the Revolution* is an excellent booklet which traces the educational system under Somoza, the effects of the Revolution on the schools, and the new curricula and reorganization taking place today. Published by the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign of London, 1980. Send \$3.25 plus postage to 20-21 Compton Terrace, London N1 2UN, England.

*Nicaragua: A People's Revolution*, 112 pages, is an excellent introduction to the social, economic and political forces which overthrew the Somoza dictatorship. Many fine photos. Produced by Ecumenical Program for Inter-American Communication and Action (EPICA) Task Force, 1980. \$1.25 plus 75¢ postage from EPICA, 1470 Irving St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20010.

*Nicaragua in Revolution: The Poets Speak* is a 312-page bilingual anthology of Nicaraguan poetry, including historical and literary introductions, a chronology of the Sandinista struggle, notes on the poets, bibliography, photos. Compiled and edited by the Nicaragua Solidarity Committee of Minnesota. \$6.95 paper, \$12.95 hardcover. Write Bill Rowe, 916 6 St., S.E., Minneapolis, Minn. 55414.

*The Nicaraguan Revolution: A Personal Report* by Richard R. Fagen, Institute for Policy Studies, 1981. A 60-page primer on Nicaraguan politics and economics by a Stanford Univer-

sity professor. Send \$4. to the Institute at 1901 Q St., N.W., Washington D.C. 20009.

*Nicaraguan Women and the Revolution* is a resource packet from the Women's International Exchange Service (W.I.R.E. Service). It contains interviews, articles from the Nicaraguan press during and after the Revolution, poems by and about Nicaraguan women and relevant documents. Useful in high school classes, women's groups, etc. Available in either English or Spanish for \$2.25 per packet plus 75¢ postage. Write W.I.R.E. Service, 2700 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025.

"Nicaragua's Revolution" is another special issue of *NACLA Report on the Americas*. It analyzes two aspects of post-Revolution Nicaragua: the alliance of the FSLN with the private sector during Reconstruction and the participation of the grassroots organizations. The May-June 1980 issue is \$2.50; see address above.

## Fact Sheets

*Nicaragua Fact Sheets* covers national reconstruction, agrarian reform, the Literacy Crusade, mass organizations, trade unions, role of the church, women in Nicaragua and U.S. intervention. 50¢ per set; 30¢ per set in orders more than 10. Available from NNSPN (see U.S. solidarity groups above).

## Slide Show

"Nicaragua: The Challenge of Revolution" is a 23-minute presentation that describes the most important developments in the revolutionary process. 139 slides, cassette tape, script. \$60. purchase; \$15. rental. Produced by NNSPN (see above).

We wish to thank the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) whose recent tour to Nicaragua made this issue of the *Bulletin* possible. We thank, too, the 38 members of the tour who, each in a special way, also made this issue possible.

For interested readers, a second NACLA tour, celebrating the second anniversary of the success of Nicaragua's Revolution, is scheduled to leave July 13 and return July 23. For details, write NACLA at the address above.



In the BOOKSHELF, a regular *Bulletin* department, all books that relate to minority themes are evaluated by members of the minority group depicted.—Editors.

## Ludell's New York Time

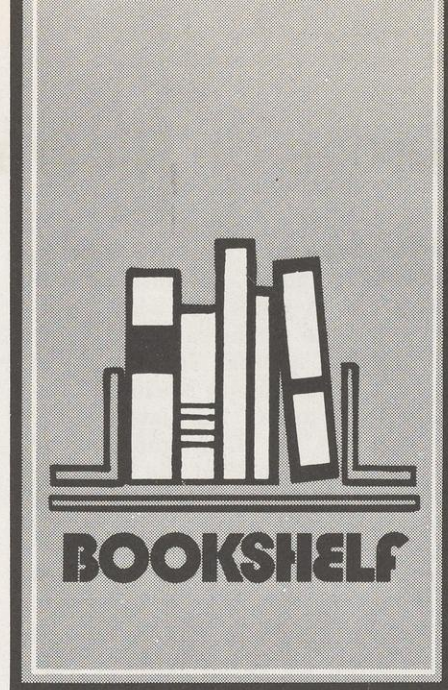
by Brenda Wilkinson.  
Harper & Row, 1980,  
\$8.95, 184 pages, grades 7-up

When I was a teenager, it would have been nice—real nice—to have had an author like Brenda Wilkinson shining her spicy, authentic dialogue from the pages of the books I read. We needed some books where solid characters struggled to solve the same problems that other teenagers had *and* those problems specific to Black teenagers—solid characters in books written from an African American perspective. Whew! It would have been nice.

The characters in *Ludell's New York Time* become known through their words. The dialogue is full of the rhythm, form, idioms, proverbs and syntax of Ebonics (meaning Black sounds and referring to the varied language forms spoken by people of African descent). The writing of Ebonics is handled well and therefore, “reads” the way many of us speak. The text, in most instances, is free of the quotation marks and apostrophes that some publishers use to emphasize the so-called dialect.

The book even conveys many of the tonal inflections that we African Americans have retained. “‘Pul-eze take off those funeral shoes, chile,’ she moaned” is really different from “‘Please take off those funeral shoes, child,’ she said.” It truly is! It means, Ain nobody died, so put those shoes away til you need ‘em, and put on a pair that look like you been in New York long enough to know how to really dress! Wilkinson handles the African-based English spoken by her characters with finesse and *always* with the dignity and respect it deserves. In so doing, she provides accurate and much needed positive linguistic feedback for Black teenagers.

In this, the third novel about Ludell, the major character continues to grow. She strides into young womanhood with great resilience. In her journey North after the death of her grand-



mother who reared her, Ludell learns to manage loss, grief, homesickness, her mother's style of childrearing, missing her boyfriend Willie and the mechanics of surviving in New York—Harlem, New York. We need more books that describe—from the perspective of teenagers—how those transitions can be managed.

Ludell symbolizes all the Black folks who have left the South, migrating North and West. The author describes the paternal, often brutal, process by which rural and small town people are put down as they learn city ways. Wilkinson does a good job of illustrating that kind of urban arrogance, and she skillfully reveals the institutional support of that arrogance. (When we heard about Waycross, Georgia, when I was growing up in Philly, we slapped our thighs and giggled. We thought somebody made up that “country name.” That's how dumb *we* were.)

Ludell is a great example of the time-honored Black practice of passive resistance. She is drawn as a person with moral fiber and toughness. Some of the temptations with which she is confronted just don't “make sense” to her. Oh, she understands them, but Ludell's been taught not to diminish herself by doing destructive things just because “everybody else” does them. Another aspect of Black life illuminated in this book is the way, very often, in Black families, that significant family members who've “passed on” are kept alive

through invocation (Mama said) and the use of childrearing proverbs. Ludell's grandmother and her standards are a living presence in the book and continue as a force in Ludell's life. Her childrearing principles are put to the test, through Ludell's resistance, in the contemporary and real situations created by the author.

In most situations in the book, Ludell stands out sharply—sometimes almost too sharply—as the SURVIVOR. She has good sense, and in most instances she has good judgment. Wilkinson draws the classic picture of the evil, sinful big city, and she depicts the city as an appropriator and diluter of rural and African American values.

Many people think books for young people should not be “didactic” or convey explicit “moral” messages. That might be OK if there weren't lots of teenage alcoholics (Black, white, Latino, rich, middle-income and poor). That might be fine if there weren't irresponsible, exploitative adults involved in selling drugs and making prostitutes of teenage boys and girls. But Brenda Wilkinson is a responsible writer who knows the African American story-telling tradition, and she writes well within that tradition, part of which has a direct teaching function. The lesson she wants to teach, the messages she wants teenagers to think about are conveyed without boring the reader and that is a strength of the book.

It would have strengthened the book had there been some positive response from Ludell about the various cultural groups that are so vibrantly visible in New York. The rather strict and sometimes negative portrayal of a few of the Black characters seems appropriate to the style of the moral tale, but the technique presents a problem when extended to the two Jewish and the one Puerto Rican characters. Writers for children must continue to work to create multidimensional characters, particularly those whose cultural/racial identity differ from the author's. The Jewish and Puerto Rican characters in this book, unfortunately, do not depart much from traditional negative stereotypes.

The story is thoughtfully constructed, moving and moves well. By



## Ludell's New York Time by Brenda Wilkinson



the end of the story you worry a little about Ludell's aloneness. You wish she'd go see her friend Shirley more often. You wish that Willie . . . well, read it, keeping in mind that Ludell's decision to marry Willie does not exclude the probability of work and school for her, as is traditional to women in the African American community. Let's look forward to another installment in the life of Ludell. [Geraldine L. Wilson]

## Like, Love, Lust

by John Langone.  
Little, Brown, 1980,  
\$7.95, 175 pages, grades 7-up

*Like, Love, Lust* is an analytical, theoretical discussion of human relationships intended for teenagers. Many topics of interest to this age group are included—friendship, love, sex, jealousy, marriage, divorce, living together, homosexuality, pornography and prostitution. However, the book is written in such a condescending, disjointed, philosophical manner, that I doubt it would appeal to many readers. Further, it contains narrow-minded, subtly judgmental statements that create harmful and false images of prostitutes and homosexuals.

In each chapter, Langone draws from a variety of perspectives—legal, historical, psychological, anthropological. Nowhere does he include the opinions and thoughts of young adults themselves. In addition, each chapter is so poorly organized that it is difficult to follow the author's train of thought or logic.

Perhaps the worst flaws are the chapters on prostitution and homosexuality. Langone presents the view that most prostitutes are psychologically disturbed. He barely discusses the economic motivation for prostitution, ignoring the fact that women earn substantially less than men across the board. Also, he spends most of the chapter focussing on the woman's role in prostitution, practically ignoring the role of the male customers and the pimps.

Langone's disapproving views on homosexuality are presented more subtly. Homosexuality is relegated to one separate chapter, thus excluding the gay lifestyle from the broader discussions of sexual/emotional choices. Lesbian and gay male relationships are presented as "abnormal," and homosexuality is continually referred to as a "condition," "an exception to the universal attraction between males and females."

Langone examines the causes of homosexuality, though nowhere in his book does he hypothesize as to what causes heterosexuality. He describes same-sex attraction during adolescence as a "normal" stage that most people outgrow, and implies that those people who don't "progress" to later heterosexual attraction have somehow failed to grow normally and remain instead at an immature level of relating.

Further, the author never differentiates between the needs and lifestyles of lesbians and gay males. He concludes with the seemingly tolerant but actually unsupportive remark that "although we might argue that homosexuality is wrong . . . our criticism ought to focus on the condition, not on condemning the person who is caught up in it."

There are a few redeeming factors. Pornography is condemned as an objectification of women and an incitement of violence against women, and readers are urged not to confuse

pornographic sex with meaningful love. The author also notes, in the chapter on prostitution, that "one cannot overlook the fact that too often, the more influence and money one has, the easier it is to get away with everything from murder to white collar crime."

The few redeeming features, however are obscured by Langone's boring, meandering text, his opinionated perspectives, and his lecturing writing style. It is perhaps fortunate that Langone has written such an unstimulating book. It may keep people from reading his condescending, sometimes offensive, view on human relationships! [Jay Meryl]

## If It Weren't for Benjamin (I'd Always Get To Lick the Icing Spoon)

by Barbara Shook Hazen,  
illustrated by Laura Hartman.  
Human Sciences Press, 1979,  
\$6.95, unpagged, grades p.s.-1

This book is one of a series entitled "Self-Awareness Books for Young Readers." Well, self-awareness is a good description. The book dotes on the self-concern, the preoccupation with self, of young U.S. children growing up in a white, middle-class household. The main character in this book has no name—he's never referred to by name and is either "me," "I" or "you" in the text. But, he has an older brother named Benjamin, whom he envies, gets hurt by, compares himself to, and of course loves and respects very much.

In the course of the book, our hero discovers that he's really not misunderstood or second-best. His mother, father, grandmother and brother Benjamin all love him for being himself. They help him see that he has his own special skills and talents, and that he is even better at some things than is Benjamin. He learns that it is normal to feel envious of his older brother and that there are benefits to having an older brother: for protection from bullies, for companionship and comradery, and for just having fun together.

Benjamin's mother is shown doing



all the household functions—kitchen chores, watering plants and dealing with the children's daily needs. His father, on the other hand, takes the boys out to the zoo, ballgames or theater. All too often, children's books restrict father's nurturing activities to entertaining or playing and recreational functions. This encourages acceptance of a sexist division of labor within the family.

Children with siblings will find much to identify with in this book. Parents will also find things to identify with, and they might find some fashionable psychological advice tucked into the thread of the story. But for those of us who want to encourage children to look beyond their immediate egotistical needs, to learn to appreciate that they live in a larger world beyond the nuclear family, that there are different kinds of people in the world who need to work together to cooperate to make the world a better place in which to live, this will not be a book for our bookshelves. [The Multicultural Project for Communication and Education]

## She's Not My Real Mother

written and illustrated  
by Judith Vigna.  
Whitman, 1980,  
\$6.50, unpagged, grades 1-3

This is the story of a young child's learning to accept and become friends with his new stepmother. The book should be a good one, but it is not. It is not that the book is overtly racist, although it is very, very white, with even the crowd scenes showing no identifiable minority figures. It is not that the book is very sexist, although the stepmother is shown primarily in stereotyped roles, serving dinner and taking the child to the Ice Show because Daddy is busy. The major problem with this book is that it is boring. Throughout this short story of a child who learns that to become friends with a stepmother is not an act of disloyalty to one's own mother, young and old readers kept thinking and, in the case of the young reader, verbalizing, "Isn't it finished yet?"

The illustrations contribute to the book's general "blahness." Color and black-and-white drawings alternate—as do the characters' hair color and appearance. Personalities and environments are not brought out, colors are muted and expressions, with one exception, are neutral.

In a society where so many parents with small children divorce and remarry, books dealing with the children's conflicting and often misplaced feelings of loyalty to the old family unit are needed. However, these books should be interesting and entertaining as well. *She's Not My Real Mother* concentrates on the moral to the exclusion of the entertainment. [Patricia B. Campbell]

## My Friend Jacob

by Lucille Clifton,  
illustrated by Thomas DiGrazia.  
Harper & Row, 1980,  
\$7.95, unpagged, grades p.s.-2

*My Friend Jacob* is a special book about a very special friendship. Sam, an eight-year-old African American boy, tells us about his best friend, Jacob, a white teenager who is retarded. The two boys have a strong relationship filled with trust and affection. The author depicts this relationship and their everyday adventures in a way that is unmarred by the mawkish sentimentality that

often characterizes tales of the mentally disabled.

Sam resists the gentle opposition of both sets of parents, who feel he spends too much time with Jacob. Sam sees their friendship as mutually beneficial. As he says about their errands to the store, "Jacob helps me to carry, and I help Jacob to remember." There are some activities in which Sam takes the leadership and some in which Jacob leads.

This sensitive portrait of two engaging young people should charm and instruct young readers. African American children will certainly appreciate Sam's guiding and instructional role.

The illustrations by Thomas DiGrazia are subtle and delicate, blending deftly with the gentle rhythm of this story. [Ismat Abdal-Haqq]

## At Grandmother's House

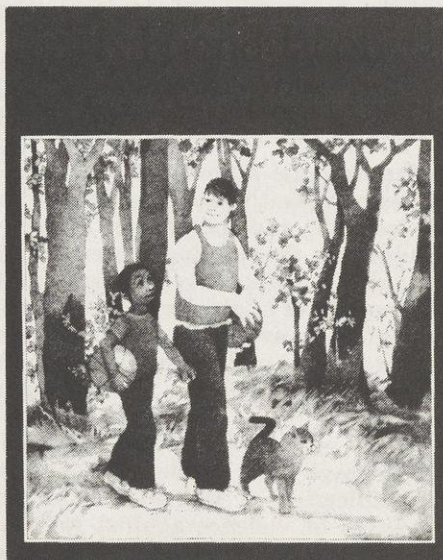
written and illustrated  
by John Lim.  
Tundra Books (51 Clinton St., P.O.  
Box 1030,  
Plattsburg, N.Y. 12901, 1977,  
\$9.95, unpagged, grades 3-5

Going to visit Grandmother is a universal theme for many children's books. John Lim's story is special in that Grandmother is Chinese and lives in Singapore. Thus, it becomes culturally informative to read his reminiscences about his childhood visits to his grandmother.

He starts by describing Grandmother's sense of independence in choosing to run her farm alone after Grandfather dies. She is kind-hearted and well-liked by her neighbors, workers and her grandchildren. Lim then goes on to describe Grandmother's village, work on the farm, and the games, food, and festivities the children participated in.

As expected, the story is told from a boy's perspective. Grandmother is the only well-developed female character. Both Grandmother and Mother are usually depicted as housekeepers and cooks, while the crew who work to harvest the crops consist of able-bodied men. But then, it is Grandmother who is the boss.

The story line is simply and interestingly told. The illustrations are





another matter. They are described as "exotic, stylized paintings" on the dust jacket. I found them to be stereotypical in that every face had the same expression and hairdo, and sexist in that every female character had the same style of dress (a Chinese floor-length gown) and appears in a static, stand-still position. In contrast, the male characters have more interesting styles of clothing and are always active—jumping, working or running. Most puzzling are the positions of the heads in the illustrations. For some reason, a number of heads are tilted at a strange 90-degree angle; one wonders if children won't come away thinking that most Chinese people walk around with a stiff neck! [Judy Yung]

## Only Love

by Susan Sallis.  
Harper & Row, 1980,  
\$8.95, 250 pages, grades 7-up

A few years ago, *Long Ago Tomorrow* hit the silver screen. It was about a man who mysteriously becomes disabled. This now very bitter man is placed in a residential nursing home where he meets and falls in love with a disabled woman. The couple is befriended by a caretaker and his nurse-wife who take the couple out for a weekend of guess what. The couple returns to the nursing home. Woman becomes ill and dies. Hearts, flowers, violins—curtain. Hidden message: disabilities are mysterious and never, no, never fall in love with a disabled person—they'll only die and leave you heartbroken.

Well, it's now 1980 and although the names have been changed (to protect the innocent?) and the story line slightly altered, *Only Love* succeeds in resurrecting the same handicapistic ghost with all its morbid, patronizing implications. Fran Adamson, a paraplegic, arrives at Thornton Hall and soon becomes the darling of the crew, playing matchmaker, confidante and bosom buddy to all. Enter Lucas Hawkins, a bitter young man who has lost both legs as a result of a motorcycle accident. You guessed it! Fran succeeds in "socializing" our

young hero and true to form, the two fall in love. There's even Fran's "adopted" aunt and uncle to help in arranging a day out for the young couple. But, like *Long Ago Tomorrow*, just when things get exciting, Fran catches pneumonia and up and dies, leaving behind a mournful but stronger-because-of-it Lucas. Moral: don't fall in love with a person with disabilities—they'll only die and leave you heartbroken.

True, Ms. Sallis has succeeded in writing some bright, witty and even quite insightful narrative and dialogue. She also deserves commendation for her reasonably solid efforts in combating ageist stereotypes, although only at the cost of perpetuating disturbing stereotypes about people with disabilities. Fran is the abandoned child who only gets to Thornton Hall, a rather exclusive nursing home, because she was expected to die five years ago. (Fran is frank about her disabilities but to a naive twelve-year-old reader, some of that openness will be scary and distancing.) Lucas, who is from the sheltered upper class, suddenly finds his world ruined. Dr. Beamish, representing the enlightened medical profession, has a solid grip on his patients' needs, although he neglects his own until Fran intervenes! Fran is even responsible for Lucas learning to walk again (shades of Wonder Woman!). The list could go on but it would only be more of the same—some good characterizations combined with a damning handicapistic plot. [Emily Strauss Watson]

## First Grade Takes a Test

by Miriam Cohen,  
illustrated by Lillian Hoban.  
Greenwillow Books (Morrow), 1980,  
\$7.95, unpagged, grades k-2

A delicious story most adults and any teacher will giggle at, though most children under ten won't grasp the message or the humor.

When the first graders in this tale are given an "intelligence" test, most of the children answer the questions sensibly—which any veteran test-taker knows is not the correct way to answer test questions. (When George,

for example, reads a question asking what rabbits eat, he draws a carrot because that isn't among the answers suggested.) The one girl in the class who seems to know what the test-takers had in mind is advanced into a special class. The other children are left feeling "dumb" and upset. Luckily, they have a teacher who restores their self-respect, and soon the "smart" girl misses her good friends and returns to her old class.

A good book to read and discuss with a fourth or fifth grade class. [Lyla Hoffman]

## Just an Overnight Guest

by Eleanora E. Tate.  
Dial Press, 1980,  
\$8.95, 182 pages, grades 5-9

This time around a new Black writer is not a cause to rejoice. It's been many a year since Black people spent time dividing themselves or rating themselves based on gradations of skin color or texture of hair. So a novel set in the present day (even though it takes place in a small southern town) which presents Black characters constantly putting one another down by insulting remarks based on color cannot aid in building self-esteem for Black youngsters and cannot aid in reducing notions of color superiority in white children.

The author introduces a Black mother who doesn't want her daughter dating a boy whose family is on welfare and who says, "I'm not going to allow my children to associate with people who don't want to uplift themselves and their race and lead proper, productive lives!" This subject is then dropped and never resolved or dealt with again in the book. And consider this: the *only* white in the book is described as "white trash"—alcoholic, a child neglecter-abuser, an unmarried mother with a child fathered by a Black man. What an interesting message that may give to young readers—that sleeping across the color line is in some way related to being "white trash."

The author throws in a lot of confused messages about color and "proper" behavior. The one message



that does come through clearly is that a parent can share love with new children without having less love for the original children. But why this message needs to have all the negative color messages attached remains unclear. [Beryle Banfield]

## Darlene

by Eloise Greenfield,  
illustrated by George Ford.  
Methuen, 1980,  
\$7.95, 28 pages, grades p.s.-2

*Darlene* is beautiful. In this very simple story about a young disabled Black girl visiting her uncle and cousin, Darlene is shown as an active participant in her world—playing games with her cousin, singing or repeatedly questioning her uncle as to when her mama will come to take her back home. Sure enough, Mama returns, but now Darlene is having so much fun that she no longer wants to go home! Darlene quite simply declares (as any child might), “I want to change my mind when I want to.”

Being disabled is not a phenomenon solely restricted to white people, but for far too long, writers have failed to recognize and ameliorate this situation. Eloise Greenfield has admirably succeeded in beginning to fill the need for books for young readers whose main characters are both Third World and disabled. George Ford’s monochromatic charcoal brown illustrations are sensitive, well-done and interesting, even though I have a personal bias for brighter, colorful books for young children. *Darlene* clearly deserves a big round of applause for a job well done. [Emily Strauss Watson]

## Girls Can Be Anything They Want

by Patricia Foote.  
Julian Messner, 1980,  
\$7.29, 96 pages, grades 4-up

Patricia Foote has compiled a diverse biographical sample of 15 women who have pursued careers traditionally inaccessible to females. Her book is inspiring and provides role models for

young women of a variety of racial backgrounds including Black, white, Latino, Native American and East Indian. Each woman’s struggle to achieve recognition and success in male-dominated fields is realistically presented, as the women talk frankly about their difficulties in overcoming discrimination because of sex, race, religion and poverty.

The book is well-written and describes occupations in the fields of medicine, government, law, engineering, space travel and television. Included are a fire fighter, a trucking terminal manager, a karate instructor and an airline pilot. A variety of lifestyles is also presented since the women are married, single, divorced and widowed. Some of the women raise children in addition to having a career, and one woman is a single parent with adopted children. Many women discuss the difficulty of balancing a family and a career.

Foote makes a point of emphasizing each woman’s ancestry and cultural background, and this is very valuable. Each woman also discusses the prepa-

rations a high school woman must make if she is to pursue each occupation; such information is helpful.

The book is limited in that the women included have primarily professional, white-collar jobs. Not included are the many blue-collar occupations which are also inaccessible to women, such as auto mechanic, construction worker, carpenter, plumber and electrician. Material about some of these occupations should be utilized in conjunction with this book in order to provide a balanced discussion of opportunities available to women. The discussion should also include a recognition of the more traditional work women do as mothers, factory workers, secretaries and teachers.

Nevertheless, this book is a valuable resource for classrooms ranging from middle elementary grades through high school. Its strength lies in the fact that it represents a true variety of women and realistically states that girls can be anything they want, but it won’t be easy. [Jan M. Goodman]

## Hiss! Boo!

The following item, which appeared in *Teaching Gifted Children*, December, 1980, encourages racism and handicapism—and more than likely sexism too, since most children will read the list of characters as male. Surely *all* children, gifted ones included, deserve better. Boos to D.O.K. Publishers for first publishing this suggestion—and to *Teaching Gifted Children* for thinking it worth reprinting. (Our thanks to Jeanne L. Walton for bringing this item to our attention.)

## One-Legged Indians on the Moon

Want to help students write stories with unusual associations? Try the following technique. First, ask for a list of interesting characters, locations, goals and obstacles. Write all responses on the board. Your list might look like this:

Characters	Locations	Goals	Obstacles
One-legged Indian	Center of Earth	Find Fountain of Youth	Going blind
Heart-transplant patient	Moon crater	Get married	“Little people”
Lone Ranger	Times Square	Hit a home run	No water

Then, have each student select one item from each column to write a short story or play about. For example: A one-legged Indian lost in a crater on the moon wants to hit a home run, but is faced with the obstacle of going blind. This idea and more are found in *Developing Creativity in Children: An Ideabook for Teachers* by Charles E. Schaefer, available from D.O.K. Publishers, Inc., Buffalo, New York 14214 (\$4.95). Ask for their catalog, too.



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