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## Nation Building And Nationalism. *Maestra. Film.* By Catherine Murphy. New York: The Literacy Project, 2011.

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The Americas: A Quarterly Review of Latin American History / Volume 72 / Special Issue 01 / January 2015, pp 178 - 179

DOI: 10.1017/tam.2014.26, Published online: 20 February 2015

**Link to this article:** [http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract\\_S0003161514000261](http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0003161514000261)

### How to cite this article:

Katherine A. Gordy (2015). The Americas: A Quarterly Review of Latin American History, 72, pp 178-179 doi:10.1017/tam.2014.26

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Federico Lorenz, Aldo Marchesi, and Peter Winn: *No hay mañana sin ayer. Batallas por la memoria histórica en el Cono Sur* (2014).

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CATH COLLINS

### NATION BUILDING AND NATIONALISM

*Maestra*. Film. By Catherine Murphy. New York: The Literacy Project, 2011.

doi:[10.1017/tam.2014.26](https://doi.org/10.1017/tam.2014.26)

In September 1960, over a year after the 26th of July Movement took power in Cuba, Fidel Castro announced to the United Nations the government's plan to attack illiteracy throughout the country, as the opening scenes of *Maestra* show. Of the 250,000 Cubans who volunteered for the 1961 literacy campaign, 100,000 were under 18 and more than half were women. It is on the specific experience of these mostly urban women teachers of diverse class backgrounds that this excellent 30-minute documentary focuses, artfully combining historical images and footage from the collection of the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC) and present-day interviews with nine former women literacy volunteers.

As scholars such as Richard Fagen have noted, even if the purely scholastic success of the literacy campaign was unclear, its dramatic but relatively uncontroversial call to eradicate illiteracy drew in large numbers of Cubans who might not have otherwise participated in the first years of the revolutionary project. The literacy campaign was thus key to the development of the revolution's political culture and its institutions. The interviews and footage capture the young volunteers' sense of enthusiasm as well as the danger of the literacy campaign, especially after the Bay of Pigs invasion and the murder of a male literacy volunteer by counter-revolutionary insurgents. We hear and see how these young teachers from the cities came into contact with rural poverty, a critically limited infrastructure, and long days of farm labor, for the first time.

*Maestra* also takes this focus one step further by examining specifically the campaign's effects on women and how it enabled them to challenge traditional gender norms. Parents were resistant to granting permission to their daughters, some as young as twelve. Many had to insist upon participating. One of the interviewees reflects that it was in the countryside as a literacy volunteer that she had her "first feeling of freedom" and "began to fall in love with that feeling of independence." Another says that the literacy campaign enabled her to "gr[o]w as a person," and "raised her self esteem." She says the experience "was decisive, in my ability to evaluate myself, to know what I was capable of. After the campaign, I realized that I could aim higher in life. I didn't have to settle for the future my mom planned for me. I could aspire to more." For these teachers, their participation could not be reduced to an act of paternalistic charity; rather, it was significant to their own political and personal growth.

The documentary also includes interviews with two students, who comment mostly on the logistics of the campaign. It would have been interesting to hear more from these students, and particularly the women students, although the interviews with teachers do

give us some insight into the ways that campaign challenged traditional gender norms in the countryside. We learn, for instance, of a man who is initially resistant to having his wife learn to read, but ultimately agrees to classes for both himself and his wife. We learn of a woman who, worried by stories of romances between women literacy volunteers and *campesinos*, comes to accept the teacher into the family. We also learn that students were not simply passive recipients, but challenged their teachers to explain the strange rules of Spanish spelling.

The documentary concludes by citing UNESCO's 1962 proclamation that illiteracy was eradicated in Cuba. Some have called this success into question, pointing either to Cuba's already high literacy rate compared to other countries in the region or the standard by which literacy was measured. Comments by some of those interviewed in the documentary, however, highlight the significance for many of the adult students of learning even to write their own names. Rates of illiteracy were significantly higher in the countryside than in the cities. More importantly, the main thrust of the documentary is to show the impact of the campaign, not solely on literacy rates, but on its participants. This emphasis makes the film an excellent addition to any syllabus on the Cuban Revolution as well as on revolutionary transformation and revolutionary societies more generally. It shifts the focus away from accounts of state repression, or conversely, celebratory statistics and loud proclamations of the Cuban leadership, to the complex and transformative experiences of participants in the revolutionary process.

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*Oy, My Buenos Aires: Jewish Immigrants and the Creation of Argentine National Identity.*

By Mollie Lewis Nuowen. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013.

Pp. xvi, 157. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$50 cloth.

doi:[10.1017/tam.2014.27](https://doi.org/10.1017/tam.2014.27)

This book tackles two areas of study that have received wide attention in the last twenty years: the construction of national identity and the history of Jewish immigration to Argentina. It provides effective summaries of the main events in these historical processes events for readers who are new to the field. Yet, it should also be of great value to those who are already familiar with these events and related research, because it focuses on the significant contribution of Jewish immigrants to the formation of the cultural identity of *porteños*—the inhabitants of the city of Buenos Aires. This book shows how Jewish immigrants were able to contribute to this identity and be part of the process of building it while maintaining their own cultural difference.

While the text can be a bit repetitive at times, the author makes solid points. It is impressive to note that Nouwen had to learn Yiddish and delve into the *porteño* slang of the early twentieth century to conduct this research. She also sought the support of fluent translators. There are multiple layers of nuance in the linguistic registers she had to decode to write this book, especially when she relies on humorous materials. She even tried to translate *valesko*, a mix of porteño Spanish and Yiddish, into English, but I am