



The award winning film, *El Brigadista*, depicting the 1961 National Literacy Campaign, is set in the Zapata Swamp, the site of the Bay of Pigs invasion from April 17 to 19, 1961. Juan Carlos Rodriguez, who was a literacy teacher in the area during the invasion, has written a fine and captivating book about the invasion—*The Inevitable Battle*.

The Zapata Swamp is one of the poorest areas of Cuba. Before the 1959 Revolution there were no roads, no schools and no hospitals. Most of the people made their living by making charcoal and sometimes by hunting crocodiles. After the revolution, Fidel Castro flew to the area by helicopter, and spoke with the people about their needs. Roads, schools, and hospitals were built there, and the price of charcoal was raised significantly.

The Cuban Revolution taught *one million* illiterate people how to read and write, bringing them out of the darkness of illiteracy, a magnificent achievement that has been used as a model in other developing countries. 300,000 people participated in the effort in 1961, 100,000 of them student *brigadistas* like the film's character Mario, many of whom went to remote rural areas like the Zapata Swamp. This was done in the face of U.S. sponsored counter-revolutionary aggression like that depicted in the film, reaching

a zenith with the Bay of Pigs invasion. At the end of the film there is newsreel footage of the huge demonstration celebrating the successful completion of the campaign.

In the film, the literacy teacher is at first greeted with skepticism, if not hostility, because of his youthfulness. But before long, this changes to acceptance and even camaraderie. The film is directed by Octavio Cortáar and was the 1978 Berlin Film Festival prize winner.

The short that precedes the film is a product of The International School of Film and TV (EICTV), considered one of the most important institutions of its kind. Established in 1986 by the Foundation of New Latin American Cinema, it continues to be shaped by the vision of its founding fathers—Colombian Nobel laureate Gabriel Garcia Márquez, Argentinian poet and filmmaker Fernando Birri, and Cuban film director and theorist Julio Garcia Espinosa—who together conceived a center to nurture creative talent in students from Latin America, Africa and Asia. Since then, thousands of teachers and students from over fifty countries have turned it into a space of cultural diversity and multinational scope—La Escuela de Todos los Mundos, The School for All the World.

See Cuba for yourself. Travel there has become a little easier although the U.S. government still imposes draconian restrictions on its citizens and residents. Anya Achtenberg, a member of the Minnesota Cuba Committee, is planning two trips to Cuba this year. You can talk to her, pick up a flyer or visit the “Arts Focus on Cuba” Facebook page. In addition, many other groups, including local ones like Obsidian Arts, Global Volunteers and the Augsburg Center for Global Education, are sending delegations. Please check out the travel link on our website for more information about how to join one of them.

A discussion will be held following the film at Pracna on Main (take a left through the lobby). It will be led by John Holst, Associate Professor at St. Thomas University, whose research and writing focuses on adult learning in social movements. The discussion will begin about 10 minutes after the end of the film.

Upcoming films and other events

Coming up next Thursday is the third feature in the Minnesota Cuban Film Festival, *Irremediablemente Juntos* (“Hopelessly Together”). The 2012 film, by director José Luis Sánchez, is a musical drama with a frank take on race, class divisions and corruption.

Race in Cuba book presentations: In April and May, University of Minnesota Professor August Nimtz will present the new English translation of *Race in Cuba*, a collection of essays by Esteban Morales, who has been an active participant in the Cuban revolutionary project for over fifty years and is one of Cuba’s most prominent Afro-Cuban intellectuals. The book was edited by Nimtz and St. John’s/St. Benedict’s Professor Gary Prevost. The events are 4:00 pm, Thursday, April 4, at the University of Minnesota Coffman Bookstore; 7:00 pm, Wednesday, April 17, at SubText: A Bookstore; and 7:00 pm, Friday, May 24, at Boneshaker Books.

The Minnesota Cuba Committee meets every two weeks The next meeting is on Sunday, March 10, at 6:00 pm at Boneshaker Books. Anyone interested in finding out more about our work is welcome.

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