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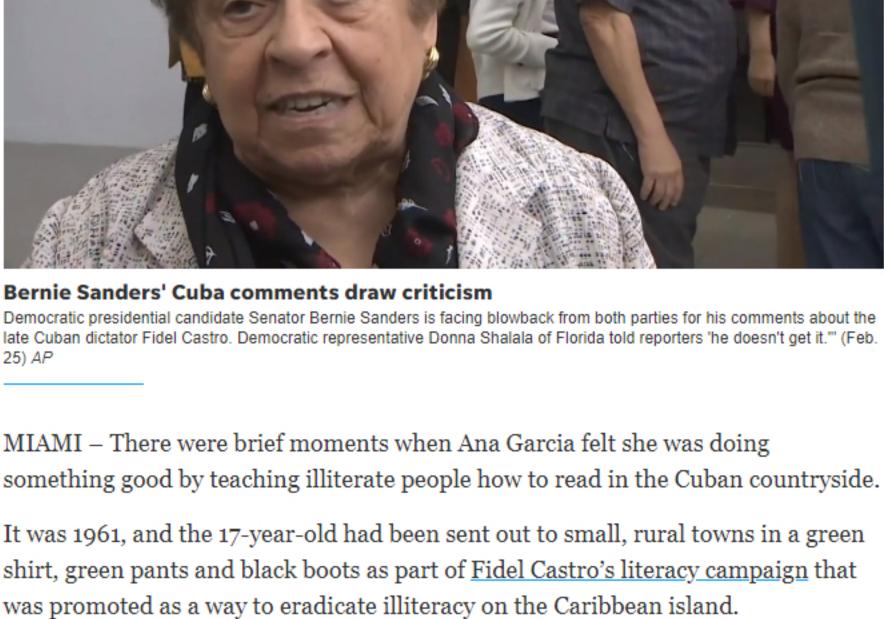
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## Castro's literacy program frustrated by Bernie Sanders' praise Alan Gomez USA TODAY Published 6:44 a.m. ET Mar. 13, 2020 | Updated 1:17 p.m. ET Mar. 13, 2020



victory. Within three months, Garcia's father had seen enough and arranged for her to be pulled out of the literacy campaign.

But Garcia knew something was strange the moment she picked up the training

and just 20 pages of suggested vocabulary words. Instead of the usual ABCs, the

student's manual featured "F" for Fidel, "R" for his brother, Raúl, and "V" for

materials produced by the government. The teacher's manual included 76 pages of

chapters outlining the glories of Castro's revolution and the dangers of imperialism

learning, of course it felt good. I love teaching and that's what I wanted to do," said Garcia, 76, who left Cuba years later

there by former Vice President Joe Biden in the polls — a Florida Atlantic University poll conducted last week had Biden up 61-25 over Sanders in the state. And now Sanders is preparing to face the Cuban American exiles that he angered when he <u>repeated his praise for</u> Castro's literacy program. During a Feb. 23 "60 Minutes" interview that has become required viewing in South Florida, Sanders

"In those moments, when people were

and became a teacher in Miami. "But

everything was designed to introduce

The history of that program will be

revisited as the presidential campaign

makes its way toward the critical swing

After losing Michigan and other states on

Tuesday, Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders is

State. But he's already being pummeled

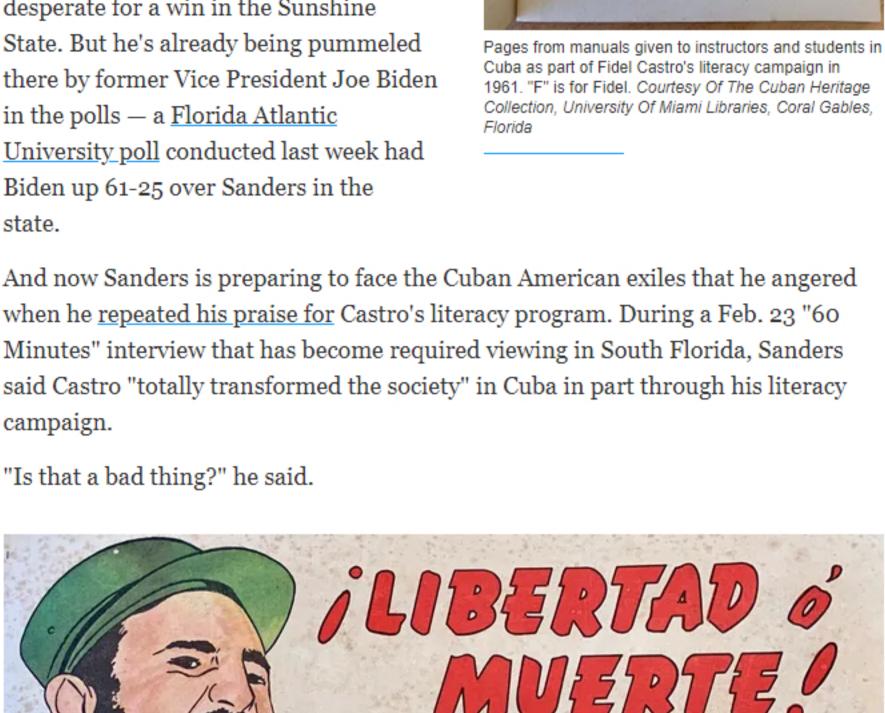
desperate for a win in the Sunshine

communism. That was it."

state of Florida.

11 Photos

remain from the program.



Fidel

Fi del Fidel

fo

fe

fa

fi

fu

El fusil de Fidel es de

La fe afila sus ideas:

ide su ideal, de su fe!

[15]

La Isla se fía de él,

su Isla.

multiple counts. They say Cuba's literacy rate was already among the highestranking in Latin America when Castro took over. And more importantly, they say

mobilization used for indoctrination."

released Wednesday.

Delivery: Varies

Your Email

Ph.D. dissertation at Florida International University. "This was a mass

That viewpoint explains why so many Cuban Americans in Florida — and

Venezuelans and Nicaraguans who fled socialist dictators in their homelands — are

suspicious of any political candidate who even mentions socialism. And it explains

why Sanders has won the Hispanic vote in California and Texas, but is trailing

Biden among Hispanics in Florida 48% to 37%, according to a Telemundo poll

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When Castro's bearded guerrillas marched into Havana on New Year's Day 1959 to claim power over the island, Cuba's education system was fractured but doing well when compared with other Latin American nations.

Carmelo Mesa-Lago, a professor emeritus at the University of Pittsburgh who has

studied Cuba for decades, said the last census in Cuba in 1953 revealed that 76.4%

of the population was literate. He estimates literacy rose to about 79% by 1958, the

how Sanders' assessment of a country in desperate need of reform was flawed. "That story is not true," he said. The data "shows that Cuba was positioned very high in Latin America in terms of education and health care." The literacy data did show one glaring gap in Cuba's educational system. The 1953 census found that 88.4% of people living in Cuba's cities were literate, but only 58.2% of people living in rural areas could read and write.

"You see the insidiousness of their brain-washing already, in a seemingly innocent math book," said Rodriguez Puig, 67, whose family left Cuba in 1960 after seeing how quickly the revolution was shifting toward communism. He lived and worked for 50 years in New Orleans before retiring to Miami.

The final section of the manual provides 20 pages of vocabulary words and phrases that could be used during lessons. Some are basic: democracy, resources, tourism. Some are militaristic: the art of war, blockade, foreign aggression. Some are surprising: the Associated Press, freedom of the press. And many are focused on the organizations and people of the United States: the

While the Cuban government said all the teenagers who participated in the literacy

program were volunteers, many Cubans laughed at that assertion, calling

Soto said there was pressure on students to participate in the program and to

"That's when my mom got really scared." Within weeks, the family fled to Florida. Garcia, the former 17-year-old who taught mostly elderly people in their homes in central Cuba, said she sometimes strayed away from the curriculum, teaching her

teacher who has been interviewing teachers in the literacy campaign, said that for many, that meant writing a "thank you" letter to Castro himself.

and writing. But as the days and months wore on, they realized they were taking

campaign. "Is that a bad thing?" he said.

VIEW FULL GALLERY Explore the manuals used during Fidel Castro's literacy program Fidel Castro mixed education with propaganda during his literacy campaign in Cuba. Explore some of the few books that Election 2020: Bernie Sanders will keep pursuing presidential nomination with eyes on Sunday debate, despite narrow path ahead Those who were living in Cuba at the time say Sanders' assessment is wrong on the literacy campaign Castro implemented in 1961 was more political indoctrination than basic education. "You can't divorce (the literacy campaign) from the political agenda that Castro had," said Yuleisy Mena, a Cuba native and high school history teacher in Miami who has been interviewing participants in the 1961 literacy campaign as part of her

EPISODIOS DE LA REVOLUCI

year before Castro took power, which placed Cuba fourth in Latin America. He said Cuba ranked equally high on a number of other health and education indicators, including the lowest infant mortality rate in all of Latin America. While

Mario Soto was an 10-year-old living in Havana when Castro took power. By the start of the next school year that fall, he said the government had even changed the math textbooks. "Instead of 'two cows plus two cows equals four' it was 'two guerrillas plus two guerrillas equals four,'" said Soto, a retired engineer and telecommunications executive who now lives outside Atlanta.

Cuba. "Fidel Castro brings together the best qualities of his people and has immense faith in the wisdom, strength, and courage of the people," reads the second chapter. "We Cubans respect and love the chief who raised the people in arms against tyranny

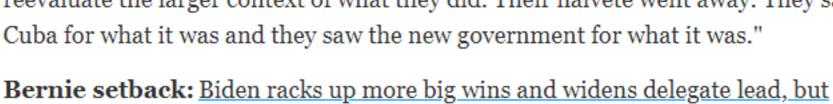
"They said, 'If you want, he could also choose to go to a technical school and we can send him to the Soviet Union or East Germany to study engineering," Soto said.

In the end, those who participated in the literacy program were left torn by what they did. Mena said they all said they enjoyed teaching people the basics of reading

"It was a farce and the disillusionment was real," Mena said. "They had to

X Cancel

Capture



"The Year of Education." At the core of the program was enlisting 100,000 young Cubans — from age 10 to 19 — to trek into the countryside and teach the farmers, ranch hands and others far from Havana the basics of reading and writing. But it was clear from the materials used that literacy was only part of the goal. Manuals distributed by the Cuban

government, some of which are stored at

Heritage Collection, show exactly what

kind of literacy the government was

manual given to the teenage teachers

government. The first chapter is titled

"Revolution." The second proclaims

"Fidel is our leader." Later chapters

praise the Soviet Union and bash the

"Yankee imperialism" that had exploited

trying to instill in the population.

The majority of the instructor's

were chapters that echoed the

proclamations coming from the

the University of Miami's Cuban

power.

FBI, the Klu Klux Klan, the State Department and "gringo." The definition for the former Soviet Union describes it as a, "Nation formed by the union of several republics, which have a socialist regime and where there is no exploitation of man by man, since in it the goods of production belong to the

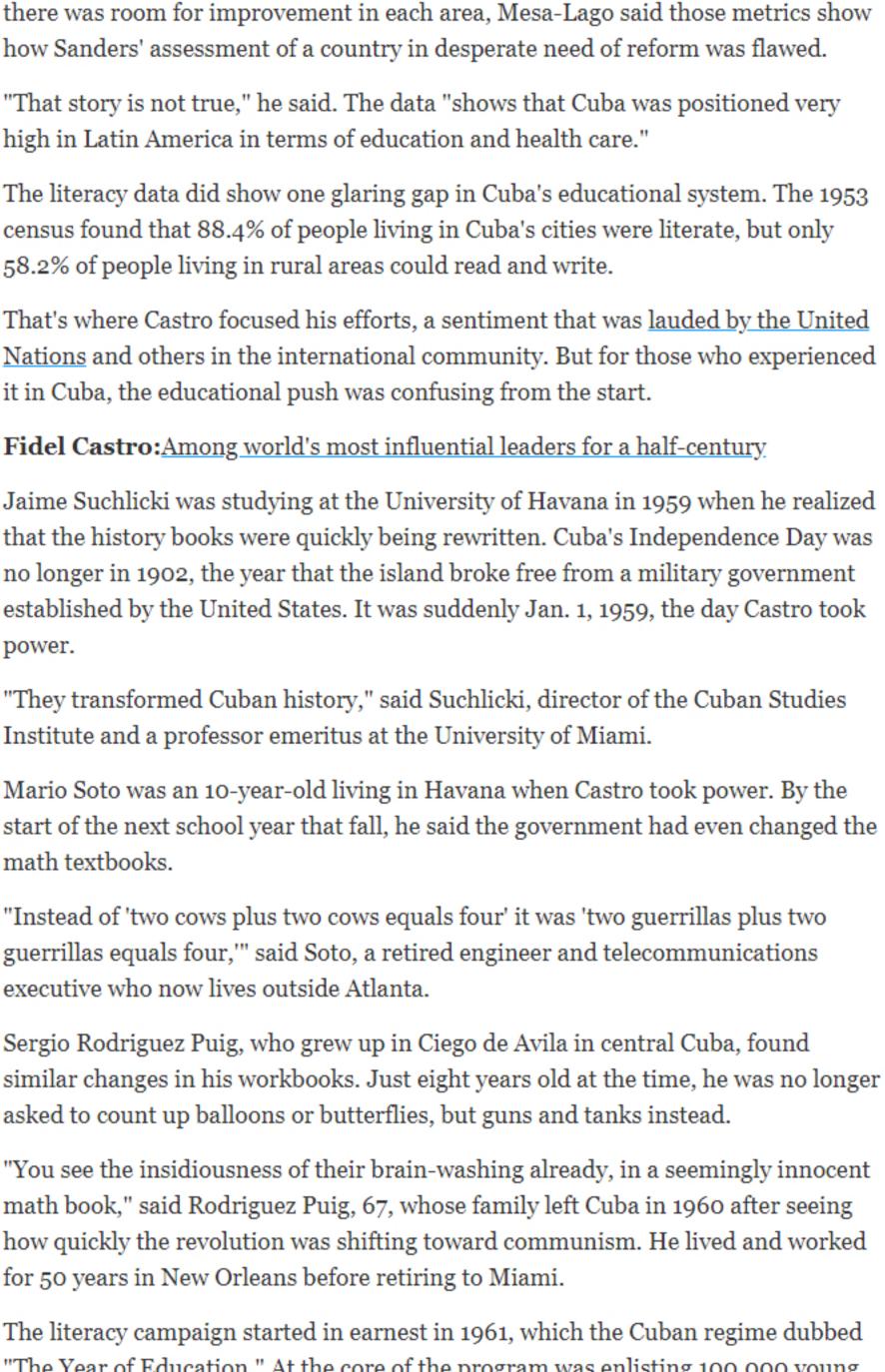
people."

and foreign domination."

accept the new lessons being taught in schools. He said that after speaking out in

reevaluate the larger context of what they did. Their naivete went away. They saw Cuba for what it was and they saw the new government for what it was."

students to read with whatever other books or newspapers were lying around. But for the most part, she felt she had to stick to the script. "I was scared," she said. "Imagine, I was a kid. You were dominated by fear." The most disturbing part for those teachers was the final exam. Mena, the history part in something different.



Young women working for a literacy campaign take part in a parade with big pencils in the streets of Havana in

May 1961 during the Cuban Revolution. AFP Via Getty

class too many times and being suspected of destroying a picture of Fidel Castro that hung in a classroom, his principal called his mother into the school and delivered a thinly-veiled threat.

Sanders says he'll keep fighting

it "involuntary volunteerism."