Popular Culture and Identity in Caribbean Libraries
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14. Popular Culture Collections in Anglophone Academic Caribbean Libraries: Some Perspectives

Elizabeth F. Watson

Introduction

Collection development in Anglophone Caribbean academic libraries1 has traditionally been driven by the privileging of print or its surrogates, e.g. microfiche, microfilm and, in recent times, electronic versions of printed text. This positioning of print is driven by two factors: the socialization of Europeans who originally owned the means of producing this medium of information transfer and documentation, and the assumption that other formats of communication were not important, had no value. Therefore, it was not considered necessary for libraries to collect such items.

This Eurocentric print bias is directly responsible for the dearth of popular culture2 materials in Caribbean libraries, as library practices in the region are guided, in the main, by Occidental practices. This Western hegemonic view of information and its consequences for collection development strategies have held sway for a long time, even in cultures and societies where oral and other forms dominate in communication and information transfer or capture. Restricting Caribbean collection development practices to print severely limits the ability of such collections to comprehensively represent and preserve the culture of the region, or to support research into the cultures where such libraries are located. Shaping this paper therefore, is a consideration of the issues associated with developing nonprint collections, given that these materials are important carriers of popular culture information in oral societies such as those of the Caribbean.

In this region, popular culture materials are critical conduits for addressing, exploring and understanding issues such as identity, ethnicity, nationhood, race, and gender. The absence of sound carriers, such as discs and CDs, films, photographs, DVDs, and other nonprint formats, hampers the ability of institutional, regional collections to support the investigation of these and other topics from West Indian perspectives. Further, the exclusion of nontraditional information carriers from collection development practices in Caribbean academic libraries, leads to gaps in the information base of these institutions and severely restricts their ability to contribute to the collection, conservation,
and preservation of regional cultural heritage materials. The fact that few Caribbean librarians are exposed during their training to information carriers other than the traditional, also has a negative impact on the development of Caribbean popular culture collections. In addition, the pool of librarians with a personal interest in popular culture is small.

This paper examines some of the reasons why English-speaking Caribbean academic libraries should develop popular culture collections. It also considers issues associated with developing such collections and indicates some of the challenges inherent in this exercise. In addition, this examination reflects on the range of skill sets, both within and beyond the profession, which are needed to operationalize such services. It also discusses the professional development necessary to equip Caribbean librarians with the skills and tools to build such collections. The paper concludes with a brief consideration of popular culture research opportunities for librarians.

Popular Culture

To place this paper in perspective, some understanding and a brief reflection on popular culture is useful. The modern concept of popular culture is driven by the work of contemporary cultural theorists such as Adorono and Horkheimer (1999), Docker (1994), Gramsci (1962), and Hall and Storey (1998). Briefly, popular culture is comprised of the arts, artifacts, entertainment, fads, beliefs, and values that are shared by large segments of society. Popular culture can also be defined as a “way of life” and the “signifying practices” of a society. According to Watson (2003), popular culture is as “diverse as the totality of man’s creative output. It includes both tangible and intangible forms of artistic expression.” Watson further expands on what constitutes popular culture over time when she states:

Changes in social mores and perceptions as well as cultural acceptability are the principal causes for the “graduation” of an expression from “low” to “high” culture. Time is also a factor in such changes. For example, Chaucer, Shakespeare [and] Bach now considered […] scribes of high culture were considered by many, in their day, to be popularist in orientation. Their work therefore did not often find widespread favour or acceptance and it was often ostracized by the dominant class of their [day]. This is contrary to how the creative efforts of these luminaries are regarded today.

Thus, popular culture is a field in which there is considerable fluidity. In addition, it is a site of contestation between meanings and re/presentation, even within and for librarianship.

The Anglophone Caribbean

The territories that constitute the Anglophone or English-speaking Caribbean were, at some stage in their history, part of the British Empire.
While most are now independent countries, some continue to have an associated status with Great Britain—viz., Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Montserrat, the Turks and Caicos Islands—and, for this reason, are excluded from the scope of this paper. Also beyond the remit of this investigation are The Bahamas and Bermuda, as their shores are not washed by the Caribbean Sea.

As postcolonial societies, the populations of the English-speaking Caribbean are comprised predominately of descendants of enslaved or indentured immigrants brought to the region to provide a source of “free” and continuous labor. Historically, literacy in English or a mother tongue was not encouraged among the enslaved or indentured. Steadfast and continuous efforts were made to stamp out or suppress traditional cultural practices and the means of communication of people of color, the majority of the population. For example, laws against drumming during colonialism date from as early as the mid-seventeenth century. Viewing culture through a Western lens had an impact on collection development practices in the Caribbean, as libraries of the past acquired only items that catered to the interests of the minority white population. Little effort was made to preserve the culture of the masses, except by those who recorded the life, customs, and expressions of the majority as sociological and anthropological “curiosities.”

Since 1962, when independence from England became a reality across the region, there has been a cultural reawakening and renaissance in many Caribbean nations. The shift of interest towards and acceptance of Caribbean popular culture has impacted collection development policies across the Caribbean, leading to the establishment of popular culture collections in several academic libraries across the region. Admittedly, some countries are further along on this journey than others. It is not possible to recapture lost time in acquiring popular culture materials, nor to always acquire desired items at the time of need, due to unavailability or excessive cost. Therefore, the acquisition of popular culture materials is a time sensitive endeavor.

Academic Libraries in the Caribbean and Popular Culture

In the past, the curriculum in Caribbean academic institutions closely mirrored that of metropolitan (British) universities. For example, in its early years of existence, The University of the West Indies (The UWI) was a constituent college of the University of London and known as the University College of the West Indies. As a consequence, there was little difference in terms of collection development practices in the libraries of The UWI and those at the University of London.

The onset of the postcolonial era gave rise to compelling forces to revise, change, and expand upon postsecondary curricular offerings in the Caribbean. Since then, the curriculum at many of these institutions has been diversified and broadened considerably, with an emphasis on Caribbean issues, regional
developmental needs, and the building of national identities. This has included a group of offerings in popular culture, often as a named discipline in its own right. These curricular changes have impacted the collection development policies of academic libraries in the region. There is now a curriculum-driven need to expand library collection policies and activities to include formats which present information on popular culture issues, practices, and expressions.

A previous strategic plan of The UWI was partly based on the need to “unlock West Indian potential for…cultural growth by high quality teaching and research” (The UWI, 2007). While this plan has been superseded, the sentiments of this statement remain at the core of The UWI’s mission and activities. This positioning of culture within The UWI’s strategic plan encourages Kochhar and deFour to state that “popular culture research had now found a legitimate niche” within the walls of The UWI (1995, 45). Other institutions have followed suit in terms of adding popular culture to their curriculum. In addition, several tertiary level Caribbean institutions have well-known exponents of various regional popular culture art forms on their faculties. Among such appointments are eight-time calypso monarch of Trinidad and Tobago, Chalkdust (Dr. Hollis Liverpool) at the University of Trinidad and Tobago. Another is Noel Dexter at The UWI, Mona, who is renowned for his Caribbean-inspired compositions and arrangements of classical, religious, and other musical genres. In addition, cultural practitioners from a variety of artistic pursuits deliver guest lectures at tertiary level institutions throughout the region. The following course titles illustrate the range of popular culture courses offered at Caribbean academic institutions: Festivals of the Caribbean; Popular Musics of the Caribbean; Popular Culture and Literature; Bob Marley and his Music; African Religious Retentions in the Caribbean; Culture and Society; and African Diaspora Film.

Several Caribbean countries view the cultural industries as potentially strong areas for economic growth. In order for academic institutions in the region to be in lockstep with the development plans and thrusts of regional governments in these areas, it is necessary for regional tertiary level educational institutions to place popular culture high on their agendas. Thus, building strong popular culture collections within Caribbean academic libraries to support these national and institutional initiatives has become an imperative.

**Popular Culture Collections in the Caribbean—Development Issues**

The development of popular culture collections is a multifaceted undertaking. This section examines some of the drivers that encourage the development of such collections in Caribbean academies. It also provides information gleaned from an informal survey of popular culture library services, as delivered by the Main Libraries on the campuses of The UWI.
**Why Should Libraries Collect Popular Culture?**

There are several compelling reasons that motivate libraries to collect popular culture materials. The principal reason is that such materials are often the only sources that provide Caribbean perspectives on national and international events, particularly those from the man in the street. The lyrics of Caribbean calypsos, termed “auditory newspapers” by Marshall (1986, 235), are a prime example of popular culture texts which document important happenings and issues. Marshall opines that if one wants to know what has happened in Barbados during the previous year, one only has to listen to the calypsos that are released during a “Crop Over” season. Marshall’s observations also apply to other Caribbean countries where calypso is a leading art form.

One notable Barbadian calypso that examined national issues in 1982, was “Jack.” Composed by Gabby (Anthony Carter) the song is about a proposed policy to make some local beaches exclusive tourist zones. While “Jack” was about Barbados, even forty years after its composition, this song continues to have resonance throughout the Caribbean and other destinations where access to beaches by locals is under threat.

Adrian Clarke’s 2001 calypso “We Need an Answer” (also known as “Freundel”) comments on the lack of visibility and the reserved demeanor of Barbados’s current Prime Minister, The Hon. Freundel Stuart, MP. Stuart’s low-keyed approach to leadership contrasts starkly with that of previous leaders of the island. His comportment serves as the genesis of Clarke’s song text. In the same year there were several songs in this vein, lending weight to Marshall’s observation on calypsos as oral history.

One example of a Barbadian calypso that reflected on international issues was “Sam.” It was composed in 2002 by Red Plastic Bag (Stedson Wiltshire) and referred to the 2001 bombing of the World Trade Centre in New York.
City. Another was John King’s 1988 “Family Ties,” which commented on apartheid and international politics. Calypsos are therefore important organs of, and often the only sources of social memory about, Caribbean happenings and the views of ordinary citizens regarding world events. In addition, these song texts are often the only conduits that give voice to the views of the man in the street on events and personalities. Calypsos are therefore very important in the Caribbean as cultural, historical, and social records. While not specifically referring to calypsos, Blosser and Lagana’s comment below speaks to the importance of nontraditional carriers of information and their relevance to identity, one of the key issues discussed in any popular culture course of study:

*Non-print materials* are a record of who we are as people. Although print materials traditionally have served as records of the identity of those who have created and consumed them, non-print materials—to the extent that they are saved and passed onto [sic] the next generation—also perform that function (1989, 126; authors’ emphasis).

Jackie Opel’s “Worrell’s Captains” (1963), released by Clement Dodd’s Studio One in Jamaica, is the only calypso that lauds the accomplishments of the late Barbadian, Sir Frank Worrell. He was the first Black tenured captain of the West Indies cricket team and led the team to win this test series against the English on the latter’s home pitch.

Image 2. Disc label for Jackie Opel’s “Worrell’s Captains.” (LRC, UWI)
The audiovisual collection of the Main Library at Cave Hill—hereinafter the Main Library—includes not only a recording of the song’s text but photographs of the game, including one of Worrell leading the team onto the field. This collection of items is unique. They tell stories about an important game in the history of cricket between the West Indies and England, provide information on a cricketer who is revered in the Caribbean and beyond, comment on the brilliance of Worrell’s leadership of the team, and commemorate the team’s feats through an indigenous Caribbean art form and imagery.

Image 3. Frank Worrell leading the West Indies cricket team at Old Trafford, England, 1963. (LRC, UWI)

In academic libraries, collection development is guided by the academic value of an item and its congruity with the mission and curriculum of the institution. On this, Weigand (1970, 200) opines that libraries must pursue “collection-building activities which support academia’s curricular needs.” This speaks to known information needs. However, libraries cannot limit their collection development activities to what is required for today; they must also be engaged in acquisition forecasting in order to serve future research interests and needs. Further, libraries in locales such as the Caribbean are required to collect an array of materials of national significance. Both of these factors contribute to formulating the mandate and rationale for expanding collection development policies to include popular culture materials.
Although Emanuel’s (2011) discussion on the use of film within the classroom has a specific reference to literature, the points she advances apply to other disciplines in regard to the use of popular culture materials, either as supplementary curricular resources or specifically for popular culture courses. Emanuel (2011, 289) asserts that audio and video clips available on the Internet “enhance the classroom experience” and that technology has “opened the door to a new canon of texts for scholars previously limited by…publishing conventions” of paper. These considerations highlight two important aspects of popular culture materials. They serve as teaching materials for popular culture courses and also as supplementary material, adding depth, enhancing, and extending the range of resources that form part of the in- or out-of-classroom experience. Both of these points resonate with the opinions advanced by Blosser and Lagana. Finally, Weigand (1970, 200) postulates that “for decades now, the academic community has been content to allow a narrow definition of culture to dictate the substance of its curricula.” However since the publication of his paper forty-two years ago, there have been many changes within academia as well as libraries. Notably, there has been a broadening of meaning in the term, “culture.” For many institutions, it now includes popular culture, and a corresponding need and trend to expand library collections to include information pertaining to the issues considered in the discipline.

While Weigand’s observation was advanced over four decades ago, and there has been some shift in attitude towards popular culture in academic libraries, many of the challenges that affect the collection of these materials still remain. These obstacles highlight popular culture’s continuing struggle to gain acceptance within the practice of academic librarianship in the Caribbean.

The libraries of The UWI collect Caribbean popular culture materials, and all are driven by a mandate to do so without regard to format or content. Collection policies vary across the campuses. Since 1979, the Main Library has been collecting audiovisual materials to support research needs. Therefore, popular culture materials in all disciplines have been acquired since the establishment of the collection. The Alma Jordan Library on the St. Augustine Campus in Trinidad and Tobago collects any West Indian material they are aware of and popular culture materials are interfiled with the rest of the collection. Mona has a similar collection policy but nonprint materials are held in closed access.

What to Collect?

All libraries need to decide which formats are carriers of popular culture materials and which to collect. Collection strategies and activities must result in the acquisition of items that are aligned with the teaching, learning and research activities of the parent institution. The itemization of materials into cataloging groups in AACR2 Part I indicates the scope of materials that may include popular culture content: books, pamphlets, and printed sheets;
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cartographic materials, manuscripts, and music; sound recordings; motion picture and video recordings; graphic materials; electronic resources; three-dimensional artifacts and realia; microforms; and continuing resources. New formats containing popular culture information, such as MP3 files, and blogs, also must become part of popular culture collection strategies of Caribbean academic libraries. Given the scope of popular culture, collections that support investigations into this field must necessarily have depth and be broad-based in terms of formats acquired. Librarians tasked with developing such collections must ensure that their holdings are able to respond to the needs of their communities.

Images in the Main Library’s glass slide holdings, also known as lantern slides, date from late in the nineteenth century to early in the twentieth, the period when this was the leading photographic technology. This collection of lantern slides is pan-Caribbean in scope. According to Widzinski (2010, 359), these are some of the earliest popular culture formats found in libraries with collections dating from the 1880s to 1900. To illustrate how such formats are important to Caribbean academies, two lantern slides from the Main Library’s audiovisual collection will be discussed. The first slide is shown in Image 4: the Pitch Lake in La Brea, Trinidad, the world’s largest natural deposit of asphalt.

Image 4. Pitch Lake in La Brea, Trinidad. (LRC, UWI)

The postcard collection of this Library also has images of different aspects of work traditions associated with extracting pitch, as in Images 5 and 6. These photos, taken in the early twentieth century, illustrate how pitch was removed and transported from the Lake, the kind of work practices associated with those processes, and the way people dressed for the tasks involved. These images of early asphalt mining reveal important historical information on social, cultural, economic, and other issues in Trinidad at the time of their capture.
Image 5. Postcard of how pitch was exploited and transported. (LRC, UWI)

Image 6. Working the Lake. (LRC, UWI)
The slide in Image 7, “Barbados Diving Boys,” demonstrates an old Barbadian pastime and occupation, whereby boys and young men of poor means would row a lighter or small boat out to tourist liners at anchor in Carlisle Bay. From their lighters these young males would encourage tourists to throw coins overboard. They would then deep dive for the tossed coins as a means of augmenting their livelihoods while providing entertainment. Historically, this practice was also a form of recreation for young Barbadian males. Prior to the construction of the Deep Water Harbour in Barbados, lighters were also used to transport people and goods to and from deep draught vessels which also anchored in Carlisle Bay. In addition, this image presents information on aspects of Barbados’s maritime history, such as lighter construction and operation.

Image 7. Diving Boys in Barbados. (LRC, UWI)

These postcards and lantern slides also provide information on the history of photography and its reproduction in the Anglophone Caribbean. They present images, content, and context in which they were created, that are beyond the ability of printed text to communicate. Some of the images in the Main Library’s collection have been used to help illustrate public lectures, theses, other types of academic writings, and publications.

Image 8 highlights the internationally popular Jamaican film starring Jimmy Cliff, *The Harder They Come* (1972 Paris; 1973 New York). The film was acclaimed by Kevin Sanders of the ABC Television Network as “infinitely more intelligent than *Last Tango in Paris!*” Its screenplay, based on the real life character of Rhyging, is a searingly honest presentation of what life was like in the ghettos of Kingston, Jamaica during the 1970s. In addition to featuring one of Jamaica’s iconic reggae singers and entertainers, the original film’s soundtrack sound track features many of reggae’s seminal stars and producers, such as The Melodians and Byron Lee. It also includes compositions created
during the period of 1967–1972. This time span represents what could be called the “golden age of reggae,” because many of the songs in the original version of this film are now gold standards of the genre. *The Harder They Come* helped to popularize reggae internationally. It is a sociological and musicological statement about Jamaica, the region, and the wider Diaspora, making it an obligatory acquisition for Caribbean academic libraries, even if film studies or popular music are not on the curriculum.

![The Harder They Come poster](FilmPosters.com)

Comics are popular culture on paper. A recent item in a Barbadian newspaper about the proposed auction of some comics invited further investigation. Quoting the Associated Press (AP), *The Virginia Gazette* of February 12, 2012 reported on an auction of vintage comics to be held that day. The estimated pre-sale value of this 345-comic collection, formerly owned by a Mr. Billy Wright, was US$2 million. According to an AP report of February 23, 2012, the collection ultimately sold for US$3.5 million. It contained some very rare items, including the first issue of *Superman* as a comic figure. The issue of *Action Comics* shown in Image 9 sold for approximately US$299,000.00, and the first edition of *Batman* went for about US$275,000.00. These figures provide some indication of the financial value of rare popular culture materials.

Within the Anglophone Caribbean, cartoons have been and are still being used to give voice to the man in the street. Cartoonists—such as the late Leandro (Urban Leandro) of Jamaica, and Barbados’s Winston Jordan, also deceased—used drawings and the local vernacular to comment on all aspects of life. Cartoons communicate with pictures and text in ways that text only is unable to accomplish. Some of Leandro’s work is available to the public through an anthology of his work under the title, *Jamaica in Pen and Ink: Selected Leandro Cartoons, 1961–1986.*
The importance of oral culture throughout the Caribbean has made sound recordings—such as reel-to-reel tapes, audio cassettes of different sizes, vinyl records of all speeds, and CDs—the most widely held formats of popular culture content held by most Caribbean libraries. Videos, films, and graphic formats such as photographs and postcards, are also well represented in such collections. While content has to drive acquisition decisions, as technological advances occur, libraries are forced to consider whether they will expand their holdings formats or not. Caribbean libraries do not usually include cutting edge technologies in their collections. Among the issues that govern a decision to embrace a new format are: hardware and software costs; uncertainty about the robustness of emerging technology; and whether a technology will endure or not. Further, prices upon the launch of a product are usually higher than when it becomes ubiquitous. This introduces the question of whether an institution in a developing country has the financial wherewithal to acquire a new technology as soon as it is released. So, while Widzinski claims that the collection of MP3 and other digital formats is “routine,” it is not yet part of the mosaic of Caribbean collections.

A major issue with either born or surrogate digital materials is their long term availability. Digital platforms have not been tried and tested over a period, thus their robustness as a durable carrier has not been proven. In addition, they are constantly evolving, with little or no compatibility between generations or manufacturer’s standards. This is an area of consummate concern for libraries, because continuous access is one of the pillars of service, particularly for AV materials.
Acquisition Concerns and Considerations

At the libraries of The UWI, popular culture collection development is guided by requests and recommendations from library staff, faculty, and, at the Main Library, from postgraduate students pursuing research in the discipline. In all cases, the final decision rests with library staff. This can be problematic, however, as some professional librarians who have a print-centered philosophy, do not have the same level of empathy toward the development of such collections. Another problem for library staff is the dispersed nature of the distribution arrangements for popular culture.

Reference has already been made to the transient nature of popular culture materials and their short shelf life as “publications.” With regard to this issue, Blosser and Lagana state: “Non-print materials are disappearing. Part of the nature of popular culture materials is that they are transient” (1989, 127; authors’ emphasis). This makes the task of acquiring these items time sensitive. In other words, they must be acquired as soon as possible after their release since they are not published in large numbers.

With respect to dated or vintage Caribbean popular culture texts, such as old postcards and photographs, the need for prompt acquisition decisions is predicated by the scarcity of these items still available for sale, and their rapid disappearance from the market overall. Further, Caribbean libraries are in competition with international collectors, who often have deeper pockets. These collectors are also not hampered by bureaucratic decision-making processes, which tend to delay action on institutional requests for purchase. Regarding this aspect of identifying and acquiring Caribbean popular culture materials, Kochhar and de Four (1995, 46) write:

Most collection development of Caribbean materials is dependent on the availability of such material. Local materials need to be purchased usually at once…Print runs are not large…and once material goes out of print it is next to impossible to obtain a copy or even locate the author/producer to obtain permission to duplicate.

These factors add pressure to purchase such items as soon as they become available.

The identification of popular culture materials is often tedious and sleuth-like, given that there are no trade organs, such as Books in Print, which aggregate information for various types of printed materials. Many producers of popular culture works are independent entities. Some of them produce only a single title or item and most are internationally based, adding to the dispersed nature of the marketplace. Consequently, the identification and location of relevant materials is a time-consuming process. Fortunately, some international companies share their mailing lists. This enables institutions to receive house catalogs without solicitation. Within the region, the absence of marketing tools
for popular culture materials is particularly problematic, especially with regard
to items produced outside of one’s territory.

At Cave Hill, several strategies have been used to acquire those materials,
including visiting vendors of recently released or pre-owned materials, be they
individuals, businesses, or Internet sites such as eBay. Other acquisition strate-
gies are surfing the Internet and placing advertisements in local newspapers.

Popular culture materials support the goals of an academy, especially
those in the Caribbean where the curriculum is grounded in West Indian issues
and concerns. Thus, any institution that has Caribbean popular culture as part
of its curriculum is obliged to collect items such as calypso recordings, films
such as *The Harder They Come*, and obsolete formats such as glass slides and
45 rpm discs.

**Access Issues**

The cardinal responsibility of any library is to provide access to content.
In the case of popular culture materials, one side of the access coin is their
acquisition and the other is often the deployment of a technological device in
order to fully view/hear content. Technologically-driven content requires com-
patible hardware to enable access. While these comments refer specifically to
sound, this is a central access issue in terms of many popular culture formats.

In terms of the almost relentless format changes, Bergman (2010, 337)
opines:

> Format changes are an ongoing concern for librarians dealing with audio-
visual materials. Video librarians have dealt with 16 mm film reels, ¾ inch
U-matic tapes, Beta tapes, laserdiscs, ½ inch VHS tapes, DVDs, and now
high-definition DVDs read by blue lasers, plus the potential for streaming
video.

The rapid obsolescence of hardware is one of the imbedded challenges
of popular culture librarianship. Over the last forty years, sound hardware
has transitioned from mono to multiple-track, high quality digital recordings,
accompanied by various, simultaneous, electronically-generated sound effects.
In addition, as new technologies appear almost on a daily basis in this very
dynamic field, many young library patrons who grew up in the digital age,
are unfamiliar with several earlier generations of audio playback equipment
needed to access the range of sound recordings held by libraries.

In the Caribbean many early sound recordings were released on 78, 45
and 33⅓ rpm discs, making it necessary for libraries to have functioning hard-
ware for these formats, in addition to units that migrate vinyl content to digital
files. Fortunately, one is not forced to source these older machines, as there
are now on the market several players that effect that conversion. Gracedigital
Audio’s Victoria Retrowriter is one of the trade names of hardware with this
capability.
Technological obsolescence had a similar impact on video, which replaced film. In the past, many feature-length films, documentaries, and other video-based programs were released on half-inch tapes, generally referred to by their trade names—VHS or Beta. Now, DVDs are the primary carriers of this type of content. The market response has been to develop machines that digitize content that was originally released on half-inch tapes.

Early in its history the Main Library only purchased NTSC videos, the US standard. All other standard formats, such as the British PAL and French SECAM, were migrated by the vendor. This inflated the purchase price considerably. After about five years of operation, as a cost savings device, the Main Library purchased some triple standard machines. This had a positive impact on the budget and enabled the Main Library to increase its purchases of popular culture content.

To access technology-driven formats and materials, players and projectors of all kinds, as well as consumable parts such as lamps, connectors, and adaptors, become part of library holdings. Appropriate viewing space for individuals, and small and large groups, must also be factored into service delivery. Finally, some basic in-house capacity to service and repair hardware must also be part of library planning and operations, as local access to such facilities is not always available in the Caribbean. While a sharing arrangement between departments/units in the same institution with similar technological needs may seem a possible solution to administrators, challenges arise when different departments have pressing and concurrent needs. It is always difficult to determine which department needs to be given priority.

Damage to AV items is a concern, as such materials tend to be more fragile than print and have to be used according to specific protocols. The experience of the Main Library has been that incidences of damage are no higher than those which affect the book collection. Indeed, damage may well be statistically lower since the collection is used in-house only, except for faculty members who are allowed to borrow AV research materials for three days. When playback facilities are required for large group use, the AV item is sent to the lecture space.

In most Caribbean libraries, popular culture formats are cataloged according to in-house standards. Where items are not cataloged by established schemes, holdings lists are usually created, which patrons can then access. Some Caribbean libraries, such as the Main Library at The UWI, have browsable video collections, whereas others do not. In such cases an appointment system has been put in place. In some libraries, CD cases are put on display, while the actual product is kept elsewhere in a secure location.

Bergman (2010, 336) reports that the historical model of universities is to keep film collections “under virtual lock and key.” This approach is often applied to all nonprint media. She argues that in order to increase access and, by extension, use, film collections should be held in open access. This argument
is also valid for other AV formats. The experience of the Main Library is that shelf browsability has stimulated AV usage.

Finance

There must be adequate budgetary provision for the purchase of popular culture materials. In many instances prices per unit are comparable to those for print materials. In other cases, costs are higher. However, the guiding concern ought to be relevance to the curriculum and, in the case of the Caribbean, national significance.

About a year ago, Cave Hill was offered an extremely rich collection of Caribbean postcards. In addition, there were phone cards imprinted with iconic Caribbean images as well as other ephemera which represented a ripe harvest for popular culture research. The asking price was US$50,000.00. Unfortunately, the offer came at a time of financial stringency and the bursary could not be persuaded of the need to fund the collection. The Main Library was told that it would have to give up something to make that purchase, an ironic and devastating conclusion. The library’s inability to purchase this collection meant that it was unable to strengthen its holdings of Caribbean postcards, or to develop a collection of phone cards, a format which has virtually disappeared from the marketplace as telecommunications companies no longer use them to sell airtime for their mobile devices.

Reference has already been made to the prices fetched for vintage comics at an auction. Another illustration of how vintage popular culture materials can skyrocket in price, centers on an eBay auction of a Jackie Opel 45 rpm disc. The song, recorded in the late 1960s, would have sold for approximately five shillings (or approximately twenty-five cents). In the March 2012 eBay auction, a copy of this recording was sold for US$360.00, a dramatic leap from the original price.

Popular Culture Collections in the Caribbean—Professional/Personnel Issues

The acceptance of popular culture as a bona fide area for research in the Caribbean has made it “increasingly necessary for the university’s library professionals to respond to stated needs and develop strategies” which would lead to a well-planned inclusion of popular culture materials in collections (Kochhar and de Four 1995, 45). Given this opinion, a necessary requirement is the availability of staff qualified to professionally manipulate the field of popular culture information. The Main Library has been fortunate in that it has been able to recruit staff who are competent in and comfortable with dealing with audiovisual materials.

Training in the management of such information is not a major focus in regional library schools. While some offer media courses, there are none that specifically cater to the management, organization, and preservation of popular
culture materials. Indeed, popular culture library services embrace many fields: librarianship—the management of information materials; education—the use of information materials to support the curriculum; and archive management—the preservation of popular culture materials. Thus, in order to maximize the development and use of popular culture collections, and to see that staff assigned to such collections remain up-to-date in their knowledge, training requirements and skills acquisition must be multidimensional and ongoing.

Organizations such as the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT), the International Federation of Television Archives (FIAT/IFTA), and the International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives (IASA) provide short-term training opportunities. These serve as very important channels for professional development. In addition, when many of these organizations meet, an exhibition of new and emerging technologies is featured. The American Library Association’s (ALA) annual conference has an extremely large exhibitor arena. Although Caribbean popular culture materials are not the primary marketing products featured there, ALA’s conferences provide considerable exposure to a range of existing, updated, and emerging technologies critical to the delivery of popular culture library services. The meetings of AECT, ALA, FIAT/IFTA and IASA also facilitate networking opportunities with experienced professionals, and service, software, and hardware providers. These occasions are very important, as it is often through one-on-one exchanges that one learns some very useful information regarding Caribbean materials held in the archives of international institutions. This is very helpful with regard to building collections and informing research, particularly with respect to vintage materials purloined during the colonial period.

Research Opportunities

The body of research in Caribbean popular culture, and within the field of librarianship to support this research, is not extensive. Work on Bob Marley, the Jamaican reggae star, is perhaps the exception, however most research about him has been produced by persons from outside the region. There are few available works on Marley that have been done from the Caribbean perspective, and much of whatever has been done is placed within a framework of musicology and the music business. This is a paradigm that needs to be shifted and unsettled. Caribbean nationals, including librarians, must become more proactive in documenting the range of issues associated with their popular culture. A first step would be for librarians to document and analyze the work of Caribbean popular culture practitioners across the spectrum of genres. Mention needs to be made, however, about work done by de Four and Watson in this regard. These two librarians have authored annotated discographies on the work of some of the region’s best-known and popular calypsonians, namely The Mighty Sparrow, Red Plastic Bag, and John King.
Image 10. Cover of de Four’s *Gimme Me Room to Sing* (author)

Image 11. Cover of Watson’s *Mr. RaggaRagga* (author)
Considered by Emanuel, Pankake’s investigation is helpful and provides a useful starting point in this journey. While Pankake refers specifically to how film is used in academia, the issues raised are applicable to all formats that capture various popular culture expressions, practices, and customs. Among the questions Pankake (cited in Emanuel 2011, 290) poses is “as librarians…what do we mostly bookish people have to do with film?” This question sheds light on the ongoing inability of librarians and others to recognize that, as a profession, librarianship has moved beyond an emphasis on packaging to providing content wherever and however it is packaged and presented. This is a perennial brick wall that dogs the profession, inside and out. In addition, the question suggests that librarians and librarianship are removed from the realities of everyday life.

Pankake’s questions provide windows into research opportunities for librarians in the area of popular culture library services and the culture itself. While some research has been conducted, possibilities abound and are almost endless, especially in terms of Caribbean content. In the Caribbean, with regard to the popular culture research enterprise, three distinct library-related strands suggest themselves: 1) Various aspects of Caribbean popular culture information services; 2) Popular culture that provides a platform/knowledge base which academicians can use to support their own research agendas; and 3) Various aspects of the scholarship of popular culture, in which librarians can themselves become knowledge experts. The presentation of such research findings will extend the literature base of librarianship and expand the canon of scholarly work on Caribbean library services. It will also demonstrate to faculty that librarians are important members of the academy as researchers in their own right. The engagement of Caribbean librarians in regional popular culture research will create a specialized space in the literature of Caribbean librarianship, which will undoubtedly redound to the benefit of the profession, both regionally and internationally.

**Conclusion**

This paper has foregrounded the development, use, and role of popular culture collections in Anglophone Caribbean academic libraries. It has also referenced, for comparative purposes, international comments on approaches to popular culture library services provided by extra-regional libraries. In addition, through its examination of the literature and reporting on lived experiences, it has demonstrated that regional and international institutions share similarities and realities with regard to the librarianship of popular culture.

To optimize library services in popular culture, new services need to be introduced, existing ones require expansion and updating, and training must be more aggressively pursued at both the individual and institutional levels in all areas needed. Considerable cataloging standardization has been achieved, thanks to *AACR2*, which was quite thorough in its dealing with nonprint
formats. Of course, as new formats come onto the market, AACR2 or its successor, RDA (Resource Description and Access), will be expected to adapt to emerging trends. The market response to obsolescence, through the development of converters for VHS-to-digital and disc-to-digital, has been a considerable boon to the delivery of popular culture information services in the region. New classrooms are being fitted with devices to facilitate the integration of technology into teaching, and there has been some retrofitting of existing teaching spaces to operationalize the delivery of popular culture information. With respect to research, Caribbean academic library services which support popular culture, are fertile areas for investigation.

While much remains to be done, the delivery of popular culture services from Caribbean academic libraries to their clients has considerably improved compared to such services in the middle of the last century. There is little doubt that over the next fifty years there will be considerable changes in the delivery landscape of popular culture information services. There will be technological, format, and other developments, and the output of Caribbean content will increase. Historical popular culture items waiting to be discovered will augment the available pool of these resources. The inclusion of popular culture information items throughout the curriculum is also likely to increase, given the Caribbeanization of tertiary level programs in regional institutions. The use of popular culture resources throughout the curriculum will certainly add to the richness of the teaching/learning experience. The future beckons with excitement and adventure.

NOTES

1. While there are several different types of tertiary level institutions in the Anglophone Caribbean, the scope of this paper is limited to universities whose headquarters are domiciled in the region. See note 3.

2. In this paper popular culture encompasses both the tangible and intangible heritage captured and presented on a fixed medium such as sound and visual recordings, photographs, postcards, slides, and other formats.

3. The UWI is the oldest university in the Anglophone region. It has physical campuses in Jamaica (Mona), Trinidad and Tobago (St. Augustine), and Barbados (Cave Hill).

4. “Crop Over” is Barbados’s carnivalesque summer celebration, which culminates on the first Monday of August.

5. In this paper, the terms nonprint, AV, and audiovisual materials will be used interchangeably to mean any format that is neither print-based nor a surrogate of print.

6. Jackie Opel was the sobriquet of Dalton Bishop of Barbados. Opel attained prominence in Jamaica’s entertainment scene during the 1960s.

7. Prior to 2008, the audiovisual collection at Cave Hill, established in 1979, formed part of an entity that was known as the Learning Resource Centre (LRC). Since then, this collection has become one of the special collections of the Main Library on this Campus.

8. Images placed on glass and projected through a Magic Lantern for group viewing.

WORKS CITED


**DISCOGRAPHY**

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