The Future of Latin American Library Collections and Research

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10. The Cuban Collections of the Library of Congress: An Overview

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Introduction

The Library of Congress holds arguably one of the most comprehensive collections of book and nonbook materials on Cuba. The Library of Congress (LC) began collecting materials relating to Cuba in the middle of the nineteenth century, when the United States sought markets in the Caribbean, and has continued to the present. Despite the U.S. embargo, since 1960 LC has maintained exchange relations with the National Library of Cuba and the University of Havana. The Hispanic Division’s chief, Howard F. Cline, fostered scholarly cooperation with Cuban academics in the 1960s, especially after he founded the Latin American Studies Association in 1966 with a group of prominent U.S. Latin Americanists.

The primary point of access for Cuban materials as well as for the Luso-Hispanic and Caribbean collections at the Library of Congress is via the Hispanic Reading Room. Electronic access as well as descriptive information is available via the Hispanic Reading Room webpage (www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic). The reference staff and area specialists are also available by telephone. Access to LC’s online catalog is at http://catalog.loc.gov/.

Bibliographies

An indispensable source for books and periodicals about Cuba is the Handbook of Latin American Studies, an annual, selective, annotated, and scholarly bibliography in the humanities and social sciences prepared by an editorial staff in the Hispanic Division and published by the University of Texas Press in Austin. Volume 65 (social sciences) will be published in 2010. The volume on the humanities is due out in 2011. The entire handbook, which began in 1935, is also available online at http://lcweb2.loc.gov/hlas/.

In April 1970, Howard F. Cline, the then director of the Hispanic Foundation (renamed Hispanic Division in 1978), with support by the Ford Foundation, convened an international conference that focused on collecting Cuban materials. The proceedings of the conference were published in 1970 in Cuban Acquisitions and Bibliography, compiled and edited by Earl J. Pariseau. This important work also mentions other significant Cuban collections in Spain and the United Kingdom.
Roberto Esquenazi Mayo, then visiting professor at Georgetown University, compiled a comprehensive overview of Cuban periodicals in the library in his *Survey of Cuban Revistas, 1902–1958*.

**The General Collection**

The general collection includes LC’s holdings of books, bound periodicals, and microfilms. Cuban history, society, culture, and the arts, as well as the basic sciences are well represented in the general collection: the most important works on those subject areas in any language can be found here.

Within the general collection some unique holdings are worth highlighting. The colonial period (1492–1898) is uniquely represented in contemporary chronicles about the Spanish Indies and in Spain’s government reports. Examples of important early accounts include Felipe Poey y Aloy’s *Geografía física y política de la isla de Cuba* (1857) and *Memorias sobre la historia natural de la isla de Cuba* (1861), and Jacobo de la Pezuela y Lobo’s *Crónica de las Antillas* (1871) and *Historia de la isla de Cuba* (1868–1878). Also available are all the works of historian and sociologist José Antonio Saco and historian Felipe Poey y Aloy.

Coverage of the Ten Years’ War of 1868–1878, which sought Cuba’s independence, encompasses history, politics, society, and literature. Enrique Collazo explains the defeat of the revolutionaries in *Desde Yara hasta el Zanjón, apuntaciones históricas* (1893); equally relevant are works by Francisco Javier Cisneros, Fermín Valdés Domínguez, Antonio Zambrana, Miguel Aldama, and Carlos Manuel de Céspedes. Among other materials are several firsthand accounts of the participants such as Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, Manuel de la Cruz, Máximo Gómez, and Juan V. Escalera.

The collection covering the 1895–1898 period includes firsthand accounts by U.S. officials, Cubans, and Spaniards. Also among these are writings by Cuban poet José Martí, Máximo Gómez, and several journalists. Biographies of key actors are all here, including Antonio Maceo and other leaders. There is also the *Inventario general del Archivo de la Delegación del Partido Revolucionario Cubano*, which covers the publications of Cuban leaders who lived in New York City in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The Spanish side of the war is also well documented, and the collection includes important historical works by U.S. authors.

The collections of items published after Cuba achieved its independence cover all aspects of the country’s history, society, and culture. Most works are in Spanish and in English, but many are in other languages. The collection has, for example, books published in Russian between 1960 and 1989, a period during which Cuba had a special relationship with the Soviet Union. The 1920–1950s period is well covered, but LC’s holdings from 1959 to the present are second to none. All the major authors are represented including Herminio Portell Vilá, Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, Leo S. Rowe, Russell Fitzgibbon,
Manuel Moreno Fraginals, Hugh Thomas, Theodore Draper, Carlos Franqui, Huber Matos, Edward González, Carlos Alberto Montaner, and others. There are many biographies of Fidel Castro and Ernesto (Che) Guevara. Also worth noting are the pathbreaking studies on Afro-Cuban society and culture by Fernando Ortíz and Lydia Cabrera.

U.S. foreign policy is well documented in primary sources and secondary publications as is the Cuban diaspora in the United States. The Hispanic Division recently purchased the entire collection of microfilms of the Cuban Heritage Collection of Cuban Radio Broadcasts for the 1962–1982 period.

For Cuba as for the rest of the Iberian world, literature presents special insights into a country’s society and culture. The collection of Cuban literature is truly outstanding. Major literary figures whose complete works are represented in the collections include José Martí, José Lezama Lima, Alejo Carpentier, Reinaldo Arenas, Eliseo Diego, Nicolás Guillén, Cintio Vitier, Heberto Padilla, Lisandro Otero, Pablo Armando Fernández, and many others. Holdings of literary and cultural periodicals are also outstanding. Esquenazi Mayo’s Survey of Cuban Revistas presents a thorough analysis of Cuban cultural periodicals between 1902 and 1958.

**Rare Books**

The collection houses rare published documents and books relating to the colonial period, independence, and beyond. Among the many unique items is included a twelve-page document published in 1799 to allow horse breeding in Cuba. There is the 1810 proclamation, entitled Fidelísimos habitantes de la isla de Cuba, by the island’s governor, the Marqués de Someruelos, pledging the island’s loyalty to the Spanish Crown during the time when most Spanish colonies in Latin America initiated independence movements. Also available are a rare copy of the 1813 constitution of Cuba, published in Cádiz, Spain, which never went into effect; an 1846 description of a devastating hurricane; Thomas William Wilson’s Authentic Narrative of the Piratical Descents upon Cuba...(1851); and Richard Burleigh Kimball’s Cuba and the Cubans (1850).

The rare books collection also houses broadsides and official publications, including the U.S. Senate document proclaiming the independence of Cuba on December 21, 1896. A unique collection is the handcrafted publications of poetry, music, and art by Ediciones Vigía, a publishing house founded in 1984 in the city of Matanzas by writers, musicians, and composers. Vigía represented an unusual concession by the Cuban government, which allowed this somewhat controversial small press to flourish.

**Manuscripts**

Although the Manuscript Division houses for the most part U.S. archival materials, including the papers of almost all U.S. presidents up to Herbert
Hoo, Latin American countries are also represented, especially Mexico and to a certain extent Cuba.

An interesting set of documents resides in the Domingo Del Monte Collection. Several items concern the defense of Santiago de Cuba against a British expedition in 1782 and measures taken by Spain to defend its possessions (1805). There are papers dealing with the antislavery movement and abolition of the slave trade (1805–1868), including letters of Cuban poet and son of slaves Francisco Manzano (1797–1857), whose freedom was bought by Domingo Del Monte y Aponte and his friends. Incidentally, this collection was donated by the wealthy Cuban writer, historian, lawyer, and collector Domingo Del Monte (1804–1853), who was born in Venezuela of Dominican parents but left the island after being indicted for his abolitionist activities. The Del Monte collection of historical documents about Cuba and other areas of the Caribbean ranges from 1597 through 1829; many are official reports of governor-generals and captain-generals, information about colonization, administration, slave trade, military affairs, and copper mining, among other topics.

The Papers of General Leonard Wood (1860–1927), who served in the U.S. Army in the Spanish-American War and became governor of Cuba, were also donated to the library and are major research resources for 1898 and early Cuban independence and nationhood.

José Ignacio Rodríguez (1831–1907), international lawyer and important political figure, donated his valuable collection to the library. He spent many years in the United States after he was exiled from his country in 1869 for his revolutionary activities. This collection is LC’s largest Cuban manuscript collection. Covering the 1853–1907 period, it contains letters from many Cuban political figures who shaped the reformist and the independence movements, as well as the papers of the Cuban Junta of New York for 1868–1870 and the archive of the Real Sociedad de Amigos del País in Havana.

Many other collections contain materials relating to Cuba, among these, ship logs by sea captains, as well as documents of American diplomats and other government officials such as the papers of Secretaries of State John Hay (1899–1905), Elihu Root (1905–1908), and Philander Knox (1909–1913). The papers of Presidents Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and Woodrow Wilson also contain important documents relevant to the island’s history.

The Recorded Sound Collections

The Hispanic Division has recorded 28 Cuban writers from the 1950s to the present for the Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape. This unique archive, begun in 1943, boasts a collection of recordings by 660 Latin American, Caribbean, Iberian, and Hispanic American writers.

The outstanding Afro-Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén was recorded in 1958 by Francisco Aguilera, then specialist in Hispanic Culture. Reinaldo Arenas
The American Folklife Center (formerly the Archive of Folk Song) recorded Cuban music and culture from the 1920s onward. Some of these are wire-recordings; others are on reel-to-reel tapes or long-playing records. This collection has a set of long-playing records, *Música de los cultos africanos en Cuba*, published in Havana and compiled by the renowned folklorist and anthropologist Lydia Cabrera.

In addition, the Recorded Sound Reference Center houses hundreds of hours of recorded radio addresses by Fidel Castro, transferred to the library from other U.S. government agencies.

**The Geography and Map Collection**

According to John Hébert, chief of the Geography and Map Division, Cuba is the best-mapped country in the hemisphere. During the early modern period, Spain and Portugal led the world in the areas of navigation and mapmaking. From 1507 onward, the Spanish Crown began to assemble maps, geographic data, plans, and nautical charts for the Atlantic and African worlds. Cuba was one of the earliest outposts of the Spanish Atlantic Empire, so it is no surprise that it is indeed well mapped.

The library’s collection of maps depicting Cuba is the largest in the world. Four colonial era items of note depict Cuba exclusively, among these, the 1665–1670 maps of the island by the Dutch cartographer Joan Vinckeboons. An early manuscript map of Guantanamo Bay is the “Plano de la Bahía de Guantamo en la Isla de Cuba” (1751). According to John Hébert’s *Luso-Hispanic World in Maps: A Selective Guide to Manuscript Maps to 1900 in the Collections of the Library of Congress*, the library has more than eighty manuscript maps specifically relating to Cuba or topographic areas of the island.

Cuba’s coastline and ports were well mapped in nautical charts from the colonial period through the entire nineteenth century. One example is a British manuscript map, “A Plan of the Entrance and Fortifications of the Harbour of Saint Iago on the South Side of Cuba,” by Captain Phil Durell (1741), which provided an entry to the city of Santiago de Cuba.

According to the 1970 work *Cuban Acquisitions and Bibliography* mentioned above, maps covering geographic regions, provincial maps, are very useful because of their comparative scale and detail. LC has subject maps,
for instance, of mining, public works, agriculture, and telecommunications. Municipal maps of cities and towns were created by the Cuban Cartographic Service in 1952 and 1953. Other items of special interest are the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Maps for Cuba for the 1900–1950 period, which include an online index.

Mention should also be made of recent maps created by satellite and transferred to LC by other federal agencies.

**Prints and Photographs**

Alan Fern, former chief in the Prints and Photographs Division, wrote in *Cuban Acquisitions and Bibliography* that prints, cartoons, posters, and other visual materials relating to Cuba form a significant and unique part of LC’s Cuban holdings.

The Spanish-American War of 1898 and its immediate aftermath are well represented in several collections housed in the Prints and Photographs collection. Of special interest are depictions of roads, bridges, buildings, and tourist card views. The early twentieth century, when U.S. economic and political interest in Cuba was intense, is particularly well represented and includes posters, political cartoons, and photographs. There is a stereoscopic photographs collection (from about 1900), which depicts Cuba and the Spanish-American War.

The Archive of Hispanic Culture collection, which was assembled from 1940 to 1944 through a Rockefeller Foundation grant, contains photographs, negatives, lithographs, records of architecture, historic buildings, sculptures, and decorative and graphic arts.

The 1962 missile crisis can be viewed in photographs of the missile bases that the Soviet Union installed in Cuba. Additionally, the post-revolutionary Cuban government has encouraged the production of posters on arts, culture, and politics, and the library has acquired a significant sample of these materials.

The portrait collection includes representations of notable Cuban personalities in politics, the arts, and the sciences. Included here are two portraits of famous ballerina Alicia Alonso, several of independence leaders Antonio Maceo and José Martí, and of Cuba’s first president, Tomás Estrada Palma.

**The Music Collection**

Most of the important books and scores on Cuban music are housed in the Music Division. Of special interest in this collection are two holograph scores by two major Cuban composers, Julián Orbon and Aurelio de la Vega, as well as some correspondence from Cuban musicians.

Books range from the general studies of Cuban music and musical life to specific studies, such as Edwin Tuerbe Colón’s *Operas cubanas y sus autores* (1943), Alejo Carpentier’s *La música en Cuba* (1946), and José Ardévol’s *Música y revolución* (1966).
However, it is in popular music that Cuba is most renowned, and since the late nineteenth century it continues enjoying great popularity beyond the country’s borders. Combining African, Spanish, and Caribbean rhythms, Cuban musicians gave birth to the *trova* (which began with itinerant musicians), the *son*, rumba, mambo, and Cuban jazz. They also developed their own version of bolero, among others. All these genres are well represented in the Recorded Sound Collection.

The great innovators of the twentieth century, among them Ernesto Lecuona (who composed *Siboney*), Manuel Barruero, Amadeo Roldán, and Gonzalo Roig, are also represented in this collection. After the Cuban Revolution, many contemporary practitioners emigrated. Among them were salsa singer Celia Cruz, Cachao, La Lupe, and Gloria Estefan, as well as the great classical guitarist and composer Leo Brower, who is still in Cuba and is well represented with 134 works.

In the American Folklife Center, there are Afro-Cuban social dances recorded in the 1930s and the set of long-playing records entitled *Música de los cultos africanos en Cuba*.

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