June 2008

Transnational Public History: Constructing Caribbean Archives and Exhibitions in Miami

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Recommended Citation

Stuempfle, Stephen (2008) "Transnational Public History: Constructing Caribbean Archives and Exhibitions in Miami," *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*: Vol. 6 : Iss. 1 , Article 5.
Available at: <http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/anthurium/vol6/iss1/5>

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Located in the heart of downtown Miami, the Historical Museum of Southern Florida (HMSF) occupies a site that articulates several layers of Caribbean history. Along with the Miami Art Museum and the Miami-Dade County Public Library, HMSF is housed in a “Cultural Center” designed in the late 1970s by Philip Johnson as a sort of postmodernist Mediterranean-style fortress, suggestive of Florida’s Spanish heritage which dates to the colonization of the peninsula from the Antilles during the sixteenth century. The center’s land at one time belonged to the Florida East Coast Railway, the Miami leg of which was built mainly by resident African Bahamians and African Americans and completed in conjunction with the founding of the city in 1896. With the growth of Miami’s tourism economy during the early twentieth century, migrants from various Caribbean islands settled in the neighborhood of “Colored Town,” located a few blocks from HMSF’s current site. It was the Cuban Revolution of 1959, however, that precipitated the transformation of Miami into a largely Caribbean city. Hundreds of thousands of Cuban exiles arrived during the 1960s and 1970s, with additional waves of migration continuing up to the present. Since the 1970s, there has also been extensive migration from Haiti, Jamaica, and most other Caribbean countries, as well as from such regional neighbors as Colombia, Venezuela, and Nicaragua. Today, over half of Miami-Dade County’s population is foreign-born. The city’s status as a transportation hub facilitates constant travel and large-scale trade with the Caribbean region, and the flourishing of multiple links between Caribbean populations on both sides of the Florida Straits. This inter-American dynamism is apparent on a daily basis in the city blocks surrounding HMSF. Walking past the myriad discount stores and government offices, one hears mainly Spanish, along with Haitian Kreyòl, various varieties of English and, occasionally, Brazilian Portuguese.

My objective in this essay is to offer some reflections on how HMSF operates in a city that has been so thoroughly shaped by transnational forces. While most history museums in the United States are local or statewide in their geographic scope, HMSF was founded in 1940 with a mission statement that specified the study of both South Florida and the Caribbean.¹ This understanding of Florida’s history as inseparable from that of the Caribbean has proven to be an invaluable framework for the practice of public history in Miami with the growth of the city’s Caribbean connections over the past half-century.

At the foundation of HMSF’s public programming are its extensive collections—both artifact collections and archives that include a wide range of manuscripts, records, ephemera, maps, prints, photographs, architectural drawings, sound recordings, and publications. My reflections offered here address two questions: 1) How has the museum constructed its Caribbean archive?, and 2) How has the museum interpreted this archive in exhibitions for a public audience? The first question examines the processes through which archival materials are acquired for an institutional collection while the second explores how exhibitions affect public knowledge of the past. I consider these questions through a review of three exhibitions: *Visions of the Caribbean* (2005), *Calypso: A World Music* (2004), and *Caribbean Percussion Traditions in Miami* (1997).² Though my comments focus on projects in Miami, they are intended as a

contribution to broader discussions of Caribbean public history. Critiques of public history within the Caribbean have examined the establishment of most museums and monuments by colonial elites and have considered the debates, in recent decades, over who has the authority to define the past and what subjects should be included in national narratives.³ Such issues of authority and representation assume a somewhat different character in Miami, in that HMSF interprets Caribbean history from a North American vantage point for an audience that includes residents of various Caribbean and other backgrounds. Compounding this challenge is the fact that most North Americans have little or no knowledge of the Caribbean's history or its global implications, due in part to decades of misrepresentation of the region in tourism publicity. The practice of Caribbean public history in Miami thus requires constructing, for a broad audience, an inclusive and intelligible account of the region, as well as tracing its complex relations with the United States and the wider world.

Visions of the Caribbean

HMSF's Caribbean archive includes more than 1000 antique maps, prints, and photographs, most of which were collected over the course of the past 20 years by its two archivists: Rebecca Smith and Dawn Hugh. *Visions of the Caribbean* constituted the first large-scale presentation of this archive to the public. In developing the exhibition, we selected approximately 300 images that, collectively, represented most of the countries of the Caribbean and extended in time from the sixteenth to the early twentieth century. The original source of these images is the vast literature generated by European and North American colonization of and travel to the Caribbean. Maps, engraved views, and, later, photographs appeared in a wide array of atlases, encyclopedias, history books, travel books, periodicals, and other works published in Europe and the United States. Though HMSF's Caribbean collection includes a sampling of these publications, most of our images exist as individual sheets of paper. This is due to the fact that dealers in the rare book market typically excise illustrations from publications and sell them as separate items to libraries, museums, and other collectors.

Visions of the Caribbean was organized in terms of two interpretive perspectives. First, we examined how European and North American artists visualized the geography, natural environment, and peoples of the Caribbean over the course of several centuries. In other words, we treated the images as constructions that were shaped by the worldviews and pictorial conventions of the artists and their societies. Second, we examined the images for the evidence that they contain about particular places and times in the Caribbean, often as seen by eye witnesses. Obviously, such images have to be read critically in relation to the circumstances of their production and in the context of other evidence. Nonetheless, it was our belief that they constitute a valuable resource in the study of Caribbean history. Certainly, images provide substantial information about spatial relationships and about material culture, such as

architecture, clothing, and technology. Some illustrations also chronicle specific historical events.⁴

In designing the exhibition, we divided the selected material into six sections: Exploration and Colonization, Agriculture and Rural Life, Natural History and Disasters, Towns and Cities, Government and Rebellions, and Tourism. We chose these categories both because they are major topics in Caribbean history and because their breadth allowed for the inclusion of many of the most visually compelling items in HMSF's archive. Text panels and labels throughout the exhibition offered an overview of some of the basic contours of Caribbean history, along with commentary on the contexts in which the images were produced. An outline of some of the material displayed can provide a sense of the exhibition's scope.

Exploration and colonization of the Caribbean inspired extensive publication of maps by the colonizing powers and in other European countries. There is tremendous variety in these maps in both geographic content and artistic style. For example, Girolamo Ruscelli's "Isola spagnola nova" (Venice, 1561) depicts tentative knowledge of Hispaniola (Figure 1); Abraham Ortelius's "Hispaniolae, Cvbae, Aliarvmqve Insvla" (Amsterdam, 1609) shows the northern Caribbean, the Bahamas, and southern Florida, along with ships, birds, and other ornaments; and Herman Moll's "A map of the West-Indies" (London, 1715)

Figure 1. Girolamo Ruscelli (d. ca. 1565). "Isola spagnola nova." Venice, 1561. This early map of Hispaniola attempts to outline the island's coast and provide some details on rivers, mountains, and settlements. Image courtesy of the Historical Museum of Southern Florida.

offers a detailed picture of the entire region, with designation of the European control of each island, prevailing winds, and the routes of Spanish treasure ships (popular targets for privateers). Mapping was crucial for navigation, administration, commerce, and warfare. Some maps, in fact, recorded military exploits, such as "A Plan of the Siege of the Havana, Drawn by an Officer on the Spot" (London, 1762) from the Seven Years' War. The literature of exploration and colonization also recorded European impressions of the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean, as in Theodor de Bry's engraving of explorers Alonso Ojeda and Amerigo Vespucci engaged in battle with Carib Indians (Frankfurt, 1631) and Jean Baptiste Labat's "Caraïbe" and "Femme Caraïbe" (La Haye, 1724). While de Bry, a sixteenth-century engraver, never visited the Caribbean and depended on the observations of others, the Dominican missionary Labat was resident in the French West Indies from 1693 to 1706.

Following colonization, agriculture became one of the dominant themes in European illustrations, given its centrality to the creation of wealth in the Caribbean. De Bry's "Nigritae"

(Frankfurt, 1623), one of the earliest images of slavery in the Americas, depicts Africans in classical poses and shows a very simple form of technology for the production of sugar. In contrast, Alain Manesson Mallet's "Svcrerie" (Paris, 1683) is more realistic in its representation of Africans and records a modern, industrial environment for sugar production, with a three-roller sugar mill and a shed with multiple furnaces for boiling the cane (Figure 2). Landscape views of plantations are common, such as "A Jamaican Sugar Farm" in *The Penny Magazine* (London, 3 September 1836), which depicts sugar factory buildings and a planter's "great house" in the distance and, in the foreground, women washing

clothes beneath tropical foliage. Such scenes were frequently used to mask the oppressive conditions of the plantations.⁵ Though sugar was the primary plantation commodity in the Caribbean, other crops are also depicted, as are local markets and various scenes of rural life. Some images record recreational activity, such as Agostino Brunias's well-known "A Negro Festival drawn from Nature in the Island of St. Vincent" (London, 1794), an engraving that offers vivid evidence of social hierarchies and of processes of creolization in music, dance, and dress. By the late nineteenth century, there were many images of East Indian indentured laborers, such as the photographs produced by the Jamaican firm A. Duperly & Sons.

Interrelated with the illustration of agriculture and rural life is a large body of images of the natural history of the Caribbean. The variety of flora and fauna in the region was a source of endless fascination for travelers. Some early engravings are fanciful, such as John Ogilby's illustration of duck-like creatures with long, bulbous bills and trees with drooping branches that culminate in single spear-shaped leaves (London, 1671).⁶ The flourishing of natural history as a systematic science during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, involved detailed documentation of the diverse plants, animals, and geological features of the region. Examples include Labat's finely drawn illustrations of breadfruit, coconuts, avocado, and other plants (Paris, 1724); John Bartholomew's map of Trinidad (London, 1868?), which includes illustrations of hummingbirds and a Guyanese macaw; and two engravings of waterspouts in Jamaica in *Gentleman's Magazine* (London, December 1783). Though many landscape scenes represent the Caribbean as a tranquil paradise, there are also numerous depictions of natural disasters, such as a hurricane that devastated the Virgin Islands in 1867; the eruptions in 1902 of

Figure 2. Alain Manesson Mallet (1630?-1706?). "Svcrerie." Mallet was a French geographer, engineer, and mathematician in the service of Louis XIV. This engraving of sugar production in the French West Indies is from his multi-volume *Description de l'Univers* (Paris, 1683). Image courtesy of the Historical Museum of Southern Florida.

Mount Pelée in Martinique (which destroyed the city of St. Pierre) and of Soufriere in St. Vincent; and the intense 1907 earthquake in Kingston, Jamaica.

Though the majority of European illustrations of the Caribbean depicted natural and agricultural environments, there was also considerable interest in towns and cities, given their role in colonial administration and commerce. Early town plans, such as Mallet's "la Ville de San-Domingo" (Germany, 1686), show main plazas surrounded by grids of streets, along with fortifications. Also common are perspective views of ports, such as Charles Theodore Middleton's "Perspective View of Roseau in the Island of Dominica" (London, 1778). With plantations in the background and ship-filled harbors in the foreground, these images emphasize the economic significance of towns and cities as centers for trade in agricultural products.

Architectural illustrations range from depictions of colonial military, administrative, and religious buildings to images of vernacular structures. The prominent American photographer William Henry Jackson, for example, produced such photocroms as "Palacio del Gobierno General, Habana" (Detroit, 1900), and "Meadow Street in Bain's Town, Nassau (Detroit, 1901), which documents African-Bahamian houses. Another genre of Caribbean urban imagery focuses on street life, including both everyday scenes and the festivals that temporarily transformed the urban environment. An example of the latter is Frédéric Mialhe's color lithograph "Día de Reyes" (Havana, 1853), which captures a Day of the Kings (January 6) masquerade in Havana's Plaza de San Francisco.⁷ On this day, colonial authorities granted the *cabildos* (African organizations) permission to celebrate in public (Figure 3).

By the latter nineteenth century, there was substantial coverage of Caribbean political events in European and North American illustrated periodicals, such as *The Illustrated London News*, *Harper's Weekly* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. Colonial rebellions elicited much public interest. Following the Morant Bay Rebellion, for example, *The Illustrated London News* (9 December 1865) published an article titled "The Negro Revolt in Jamaica," with an engraving of the site where most of the summary trials and executions of the protesters took place. On 16 November 1878 *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (New York) ran a portfolio of images titled "Santa Cruz—Scenes and Incidents of the Recent Insurrection and Incendiarism of the

Figure 3. Frédéric Mialhe (1810-1881). "Día de Reyes." Havana, 1853. Mialhe, a French artist and lithographer who lived in Cuba from 1838 to 1854, produced over 100 views of urban and rural scenes. Copied extensively and published throughout the world, his illustrations were central to the construction of the image of Cuba during the nineteenth century. Image courtesy of the Historical Museum of Southern Florida.

Negroes of the Island.” These engravings are particularly significant in that they document actual events of the riot, as sketched by a resident of St. Croix (Figure 4). Portraits of political leaders in Haiti appeared in such articles as “Faustin I, Emperor of Hayti” in *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* (12 February 1859) and “The Haytian Insurrection” in *Harper’s Weekly* (New York, 1 December 1888). There was also extensive documentation of the Cuban Wars of Independence, including such illustrations as “Harbor of Havana—Landing of Spanish Reinforcements for Cuba” in *Harper’s Weekly* (22 May 1869); and “L’insurrection de Cuba: Un combat dans les palmiers” in *L’Illustration* (Paris, 20 July 1895), which

showed Cuban snipers in a palm tree exchanging gunfire with Spanish troops on the ground. Many illustrations appeared in the American press when the U.S. intervened in the second Cuban independence war in 1898. An earlier example of U.S. expansionism in the region was a commission sent to the Dominican Republic in 1871 to consider the possibility of annexing the country by purchase. *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* provided extensive coverage of the commission’s tour through the drawings of James E. Taylor, an artist on special assignment for the paper.

Another dimension of North American interest in the Caribbean was the rise of organized tourism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The industry produced an array of books, pamphlets, postcards, and advertisements that represented the region as an enticing new locale for adventure and leisure. After the Spanish-Cuban-American War, *Harper’s Weekly* (18 March 1899) ran a cover illustration titled “The Second Invasion of Cuba: Tourists from the ‘Paris’ at Morro Castle, Santiago,” which showed a group of visitors from the U.S. steamer *Paris* investigating a battle site. With the employment of its steamships in the tourist trade, the United Fruit Company published booklets such as *Cruising the Caribbean in the Wake of Pirates* (1915), which included illustrations of Jamaica, Cuba, and Panama. Postcards were particularly popular mementos for travelers and were produced by numerous firms in North America, Europe, and the Caribbean. The Detroit Photographic Company continued to publish William Henry Jackson’s photographs of the Bahamas and Cuba, while A. Duperly & Sons of Kingston offered many scenes of Jamaica. To a large extent, the tourist literature of this period recycled a

Figure 4. Alfred Rondier. “Santa Cruz: Scenes and Incidents of the Recent Insurrection and Incendiarism of the Negroes of the Island.” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, 1878. Shown here is one image of a labor riot in St. Croix, from a page of illustrations by an eye-witness. Image courtesy of the Historical Museum of Southern Florida.

well-established European iconography of the Caribbean that emphasized lush tropical environments and that reduced working people to picturesque elements of nature.⁸

As the above outline suggests, *Visions of the Caribbean* was wide-ranging both in types of illustrations and in subject matter. From sixteenth-century maps to twentieth-century tourist advertisements, HMSF's archive offered many possibilities for the exploration of the region's visual history. We chose to organize the exhibition in terms of the six categories indicated, but numerous other arrangements could have been pursued. A geographic organization, for example, would have allowed visitors to see patterns in the representation of natural environments, cultural practices, and political events within particular islands. A chronological organization, in turn, would have provided a clearer sense of processes of change and offered a comparative perspective on imagery from various time periods. The exhibition could also have been organized to highlight other topics, such as gender and ethnic relations.

In short, the items in HMSF's Caribbean collection could be interpreted in many different ways, which is the case with any archive. Though the particular acquisitions practices of an institution give its archive a certain "authorizing" power in terms of the shaping of possible stories, no institutional or curatorial agenda can fully contain an archive's universe of significance. In fact, every archive is a dynamic, open-ended phenomenon that is constantly re-created by its diverse users. Every researcher potentially finds something new when exploring an archive, as does every visitor to an exhibition. The possibilities for discovery are particularly rich in archives of Caribbean visual material, much of which has not been used in scholarly studies, textbooks, or exhibitions.

HMSF's Caribbean archive does, however, set certain limits for possible exhibitions. While we were able to present some photographs by the Jamaican firm of A. Duperly & Sons, many other photography studios existed in the Caribbean during the nineteenth century, and their work would offer other perspectives on the region. Unfortunately, much of this material is lost, in private hands, or infrequently appears on the market for institutions like HMSF to purchase. Another major limitation of our Caribbean archive is that its contents after 1920 are very sketchy. In the course of the twentieth century, both Caribbean and foreign photographers produced a tremendous quantity of images of the region. At present, our archive does not begin to contain even a representative sampling of this output. If assembled, such an archive would reveal far more complex perceptions of the region, and would have allowed for the extension of *Visions of the Caribbean* beyond the early twentieth century.

We attempted to address this major lacuna in the exhibition with related educational programming. During the period that the exhibition was on display, we presented a panel discussion with visual artists Kenwyn Crichlow, Carlos Betancourt, and Maria Martinez Canas; screened films including Raoul Peck's *Man by the Shore*, Stephanie Black's *Life and Debt*, and Christopher Laird and Anthony Hall's *And the Dish Ran Away with the Spoon*; hosted readings by Merle Collins and other writers; held a program on Vodou dance and cosmology; and

presented a concert of traditional Puerto Rican music by Plena Es.⁹ This programming offered alternative perspectives on the subject matter of the exhibition and expanded public dialogue. The exhibition became less of a single statement by the curators and more of a conversation that unfolded over several months.

Calypso: A World Music

While HMSF's archive of antique Caribbean maps, prints, and photographs is a permanent collection that is available for ongoing research and future exhibitions, the museum also develops relationships with private collectors from whom it borrows material on a temporary basis for specific exhibition projects. In the case of *Calypso: A World Music* (2004), we collaborated with Ray Funk, a judge in Fairbanks, Alaska, who holds a massive collection of calypso-related materials, including sound recordings, songbooks, sheet music, movies, television shows, movie posters, photographs, and advertisements. Funk acquired this material from a variety of sources, including many calypso artists themselves. One of his most important sources was eBay, particularly for items from the United States where calypso was exploited by the mass entertainment industry. The primary goal of our partnership with Funk was to provide public access to selections from what is certainly the largest private calypso archive in the world.

After forming an international advisory committee of calypso scholars for the project, we began working with Funk to develop two presentations: an extensive online exhibition, titled *Calypso: A World Music* (www.calypsoworld.org), and a smaller traveling exhibition, titled *Calypso Music in Postwar America: Photographs and Illustrations, 1945-1960*. While the online exhibition has presented and interpreted digital images to a worldwide audience for a period of several years, the traveling exhibition enabled audiences to see original archival materials in several locales, including Miami; New York; Port of Spain, Trinidad; Kansas City, Missouri; Bloomington, Indiana; and Urbana, Illinois. Though Funk's collection served as the core of both exhibitions, we also acquired additional material from calypso artists in New York and London and from institutional collections, such as New York Public Library, the Museum of the City of New York, the Library of Congress, and the Smithsonian.¹⁰

Featuring over 350 images, *Calypso: A World Music* explores the international dissemination of calypso from Trinidad. The exhibition focuses on the 1930s to the 1960s, since it was during these decades that calypso was transformed from a local musical tradition into a pan-Atlantic popular music. In short, calypso became part of an international nexus as phonograph records, radio programs, sheet music, movies, and television shows transmitted the music to countries throughout the Atlantic world. At the same time, migration, artistic tours, military service, and tourism constantly moved calypsonians and audiences to new locations for performances. Through this pan-Atlantic circulation, a variety of interconnected calypso scenes

emerged. Each scene developed distinct characteristics but was influenced by the production of calypso in other locales.¹¹

Designed to present visual evidence of calypso's circulation and adaptation to diverse cultural settings, the online exhibition is organized into several major sections: "Calypso in Trinidad," "International Calypso," "Artists," "Songs," and "Calypso Today." "Calypso in Trinidad" introduces viewers to the emergence of modern calypso in Trinidad around 1900, its relation to Carnival, the importance of calypso "tents," the process of calypso composition, and early recordings of the music. "Calypso Today," on the other hand, examines post-1970 developments (such as the rise of soca) and is intended to inform a general audience that the music continues to flourish both in the Caribbean and the diaspora. The bulk of the exhibition, however, is contained in the "International Calypso" section. Here viewers find a map of the Atlantic world where they can explore the mid-twentieth century dissemination of calypso by clicking on various locales: the Caribbean and Latin America, the United States, Canada, England, Continental Europe, and Africa. Each regional scene is represented by a variety of images of media products (such as record album covers or sheet music) and of public performances (such as nightclub acts or theatrical shows). Viewers also have the option of examining images and biographical sketches of prominent mid-twentieth century calypso performers in the "Artists" section, or of tracing the history of popular calypsos and related songs of the period in the "Songs" section.

Outside Trinidad, calypso achieved its greatest mid-century popularity in the United States, and the huge volume of promotional graphics created by the entertainment industry constitutes the largest portion of the exhibition. We include various items related to Trinidadian pioneers of calypso in the U.S., such as *Calypso Songs of the West Indies* (New York, 1943), a songbook co-compiled by pianist/arranger Lionel Belasco who settled in New York in the 1910s; a photograph of the vaudevillian Sam Manning who lived in New York for various periods between the 1920s and 1950s; and the album *Harlem Seen Through Calypso Eyes* (Decca, ca. 1940), featuring Houdini who was known as the "Calypso King of New York" during the 1930s and 1940s. The recording sessions and nightclub performances of major Trinidadian calypsonians in New York during the

Figure 5. Macbeth the Great (left) and Sir Lancelot (center), with Gerald Clark (right) and His Caribbean Serenaders (from left): Felix Pacheco, Gregory Felix, Rogelio Garcia, and an unidentified musician. New York, 1940s. Clark led the leading calypso band in New York during the 1930s and 1940s. Image courtesy of Lancelot Pinard and Ray Funk.

1930s and 1940s are represented by such images as a photograph of the Roaring Lion and Atilla the Hun in a studio; the label for their popular record “Guests of Rudy Vallee” (Decca, 1938); and a photograph of Atilla, Growling Tiger, King Radio, and Killer at the Village Vanguard in 1949. A glimpse of the popularity of calypso during World War II is offered by photographs of U.S. military bases in Trinidad and a copy of the sheet music for “Rum and Coca Cola” (New York, 1944), the Lord Invader calypso that was plagiarized by the comedian Morey Amsterdam and turned into a major hit by the Andrews Sisters. The prominence of a new group of Trinidadian calypso singers in New York during the 1940s is illustrated by such images as a photograph of Sir Lancelot and Macbeth the Great with Gerald Clark and His Caribbean Serenaders (Figure 5); a photograph of Lancelot in the Hollywood movie *Happy Go Lucky* (1943); and an advertisement for *Calypso At Midnight* (1946), a concert produced by folklorist Alan Lomax with Invader, Macbeth, the Duke of Iron, and Gerald Clark’s band.

This material is followed by an exhibition section that examines the 1956-1957 “Calypso Craze,” a brief period when calypso became a form of mass entertainment in the U.S. An increase in American tourism in the Caribbean in the postwar era (illustrated by postcards) paved the way for the craze, which was sparked by the release of Harry Belafonte’s *Calypso* (RCA Victor, 1956), the first album to sell over one million copies in entertainment history. Numerous American singers performed calypso, ranging from Nat King Cole, who was featured on the record *Hit Calypsos!* (Capitol), to the Tarriers, a folksong revival trio who produced a songbook titled *Calypso-Land* (New

Figure 6. Maya Angelou performing in the Hollywood movie *Calypso Heat Wave* (Columbia Pictures, 1957). Angelou, who had a Trinidadian grandfather, was well known as a calypso dancer and singer during the late 1950s.

Image courtesy of Ray Funk.

York, 1957). In 1957, Hollywood released three calypso-themed movies, including *Calypso Heat Wave* (Columbia Pictures), which included the calypso dancer/singer Maya Angelou (Figure 6). These movies were promoted with a variety of posters, lobby cards, and press books that employed vibrant graphics to represent fantasized scenes of calypso revelry in generic tropical settings. During 1956 and 1957, Caribbean and American artists also performed in various calypso clubs (with pseudo-Caribbean décor), as represented in an advertisement for “Caribbean Nights” at Le Cupidon in New York, a Chicago visitors’ guide featuring “Calypso Fantasia” at the Blue Angel, and a photograph of the Jamaican mento/calypso artist Lord Flea at the Vagabond in Miami.

Compared to the frenzied graphics of the American entertainment industry, calypso material from Great Britain reveals a quite different scene. Here the primary markets for calypso records were the Caribbean immigrant community and the Caribbean itself, though many other people also became familiar with the music through broadcasts and live performances. While calypso was performed in the U.K. before and during World War II, the music's profile was heightened significantly with the arrival of the Trinidadian calypsonians Lord Kitchener and Lord Beginner on the MV *Empire Windrush* in 1948. Both began recording in 1950, as represented by images of the record labels for Kitchener's "The Underground Train" (Parlophone), which examined adjustments to life in London, and Lord Beginner's "Victory Test Match" (Melodisc), which chronicled the West Indies cricket team's first victory over England at Lord's. Photographs show the Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra (TASPO) playing at the Festival of Britain in 1951 and performances by Trinidadian pianist Russ Henderson's band, which functioned as both a jazz ensemble and a steelband. Another figure in the British calypso scene was Trinidadian singer George Browne, whose songbook *The Royal Souvenir Calypso Album* (ca. 1955) included "I Was There." With an eye on the market, Browne wrote and recorded this detailed song about the coronation of Elizabeth II (1953) in advance of the actual event. However, the calypso artist who reached the widest audience in the U.K. was Cy Grant, a Guyanese RAF veteran who became an actor and singer. Items from Grant's substantial personal archive include a photograph of him appearing in *A Man from the Sun* (1956), a BBC television drama on Caribbean migration to London in which he sings Kitchener's "My Landlady"; a magazine cover photograph (1957) pertaining to his nightly calypso performances for a BBC television news show; and a movie press sheet for *Calypso* (1958), a French/Italian film in which he starred.

Material in other sections of the exhibition illustrates many facets of the dissemination and adaptation of calypso in the Americas, Africa, and Europe. For example, there are a 1950s postcard of calypso singers performing for tourists on Grande Anse Beach in Grenada; a 1950s album of Jamaican mento songs titled *Authentic Jamaican Calypsos*; the songbook *Blind Blake Calypso Songs* (New York, 1954), featuring songs by the best-known Bahamian goombay/calypso performer; a photograph of kaseko/calypso saxophonist and bandleader George Schermacher performing at a dance in Suriname in the 1960s; an album titled *Panama Calypso Varieties*; and a lobby card for the Spanish-language

Figure 7. Lobby card for the Spanish-language version of the Hollywood movie *Calypso Joe* (Allied Artists, 1957). Music for the movie was provided by Trinidadian Duke of Iron, Jamaican Lord Flea, and the Easy Riders, an American folksong revival group. Image courtesy of Ray Funk.

version of the Hollywood movie *Calypso Joe* (Allied Artists, 1957), which was distributed in Mexico (Figure 7). Among the many items from the other side of the Atlantic are photographs of E.T. Mensah and his Tempos Band and King Bruce and the Black Beats, Ghanaian highlife musicians who were influenced by calypso during the 1940s and 1950s; an advertising record titled “Calypso Nescafe” (Deutsche Grammophon) by the Surinamese saxophonist Max Woiski, who lived in the Netherlands; a record of calypsos by Henri Salvador, one of France’s most popular singers during the 1950s; and a record titled *Todos Bailan Calypso*, released in Spain by a German band led by Horst Wende.

Certainly, the main accomplishment of *Calypso: A World Music* has been to provide public access to an extensive collection of somewhat obscure calypso images from numerous countries. The exhibition offers both visual evidence of the pan-Atlantic circulation of calypso and a perspective on how this circulation was structured by imperial networks, commercial markets, diverse mass media, and international tourism. Moreover, it demonstrates the growing impact, in the course of the twentieth century, of Caribbean art forms on cultural practices in several parts of the world. This story is complex and multi-directional. One advantage of an online exhibition is that viewers have the flexibility of pursuing their own lines of inquiry: they can navigate the exhibition through various paths and, in effect, create their own calypso archive.

This open-ended learning experience was extended through a series of public conferences organized in conjunction with the exhibition. In 2004, HMSF collaborated with the Institute for Studies in American Music at Brooklyn College to present *Calypso in New York and the Atlantic World*, and in 2005 partnered with Caribbean Literary Studies at the University of Miami to produce *Calypso and the Caribbean Literary Imagination*. Following these two events, the Centre for Cultural Analysis, Theory and History at the University of Leeds organized *Comings and Goings—Calypso: A Moment and Movement Concerning Memory, Migration and Displacement* (2005), while the National Library of Trinidad and Tobago presented *Calypso Journeys: Triumphs and Challenges of the Music* (2006). In response to the scope and themes of *Calypso: A World Music*, all four conferences explored calypso as a transnational music interrelated with various other art forms.¹²

Though it provided access to an archive and generated diverse dialogues, *Calypso: A World Musical* so raised some troubling issues concerning visual representations and the limitations of archives. In short, the images of calypso that we were able to find in private and institutional collections offer an incomplete picture of the international performance of the music during the mid-twentieth century. In the U.S., in particular, the majority of the images are promotional graphics that were designed to sell records, sheet music, movies, and other products. As a whole, these images attempted to generate public attraction to calypso by representing it as a non-threatening recreational music. There are endless stereotypical illustrations of tropical beaches, palm trees, and rural scenes, even though calypso was primarily an urban music (Figure 8). And few images suggest its significance as social and political commentary. Largely absent from the archives are documentary (as opposed to publicity) photographs of calypso artists and

their performances. For example, we were unable to locate any mid-twentieth century photographs of calypso singers performing for Caribbean audiences in New York. In fact, there are few photographs of leading Trinidadian calypsonians performing for any audiences in the U.S. While there are scores of available images of Harry Belafonte, photographs of Atilla, Invader, and other major artists are rare. Many of the calypso images from other parts of the world are also stereotypical promotional graphics, though there are also significant documentary photographs.¹³

Figure 8. Sheet music for “Marianne.” New York, 1957. “Marianne,” composed by Trinidadian calypsonian Roaring Lion, was one of the popular songs during the U.S. “calypso craze” of 1956-1957. Image courtesy of Ray Funk.

Caribbean Percussion Traditions in Miami

The limitations of the available archives for *Calypso: A World Music* demonstrate the ongoing importance of carrying out systematic documentary photography and videography of Caribbean performing arts and permanently archiving the results. Such documentary research and the construction of a new archive provided the foundation for the final exhibition reviewed here: *Caribbean Percussion Traditions in Miami* (1997). As a crossroads of the Caribbean, South Florida has a multifaceted music scene, including not only such popular forms as salsa, merengue, konpa, reggae, and soca, but a wide range of drumming and other percussion traditions that play key roles in religious rituals and festive celebrations within Caribbean communities. The objective of HMSF’s exhibition was to increase general public awareness of these lesser known musical forms.¹⁴ Since little documentary evidence of these forms existed in HMSF’s archive or any other archive in Miami, our first step was to develop a fieldwork project. To this end, we established a community advisory committee and recruited a team of fieldworkers who carried out research in Miami’s Cuban, Puerto Rican, Haitian, Trinidadian, and Bahamian communities.¹⁵ Between April 1996 and May 1997, we visited Cuban Orisha and Haitian Vodou ceremonies, Trinidadian Carnival and Bahamian Junkanoo celebrations, Trinidadian Hindu weddings and festivals, Cuban rumba and Puerto Rican plena sessions, and other occasions involving percussion. We also documented artists making drums and other percussion instruments in their homes and yards. As a result of this research, we deposited in HMSF’s archive over 1800 photographs, approximately 60 audiotapes of interviews and musical performances, miscellaneous video footage, and a collection of research reports. The exhibition

featured material from this collection, as well as more than 100 percussion instruments and related religious and festive items. While most of the artifacts were loaned by community members, some were eventually donated to or purchased by HMSF for its permanent collection.

In designing the exhibition, we re-created within our museum gallery some of the indoor ritual and outdoor festive environments in which Caribbean percussion traditions are practiced in Miami. We also highlighted individual percussionists and craftsmen of percussion instruments. Visitors moved through a series of spaces that presented artifacts in the context of large-scale photomurals, other photographic displays, video monitors, and audio stations.

The Cuban section of the exhibition focused on Ezequiel Torres, one of the best-known drummers and drummakers in Miami's Orisha community, estimated to include over 100,000 practitioners.¹⁶ The section opened with a video and series of photographs that showed Torres in his backyard carving a set of three *batá* drums, the hour-glass shaped instruments that are employed for the most important Orisha rituals (Figure 9). The completed drums were displayed in an adjacent space, along with a selection of hand-made garments worn by practitioners for initiations and for special dances during ceremonies. This display led into a small room that contained a "throne" (altar) for Shangó, the orisha (deity) who is considered to be the owner of *batá* drums. The throne, an elaborate installation of colored fabrics and ritual items, was created by Norberto Fernandez, a specialist in this tradition, and by Willie Ramos, a project advisor/fieldworker and one of the leading Orisha priests in Miami. An audio track in the room featured Torres's *batá* ensemble playing the *oru igbodú*, an invocation of the orishas that is drummed in front of a throne at the beginning of a ceremony.

Figure 9. *Caribbean Percussion Traditions in Miami* exhibition. Photographic and video display of Ezequiel Torres carving a *batá* drum, an instrument used for Cuban Orisha ceremonies. At left are three shekerés (also made by Torres), a conga drum, and a cowbell, which are also employed in ceremonies. Image courtesy of the Historical Museum of Southern Florida.

These Orisha exhibits were followed by a small installation related to the Kongo-derived Cuban Palo religion and displays of Cuban and Puerto Rican secular percussion instruments, such as conga drums and *cajones* (wooden boxes) used for rumba and *panderos* (hand drums) employed in plena. Photographs and audio recordings provided a sense of rumba and plena performances.¹⁷

The Haitian section of the exhibition introduced visitors to the Rada and Petwo divisions of Vodou *lwa* (spirits) and their associated drums.¹⁸ Rada drums are covered with cowhide,

which is attached with wooden pegs and rope wrapped around the pegs, while Petwo drums have goatskin covers that are attached by a loop of rubber and a system of cords. One of the sets of Rada drums on display was constructed by Cathelus “Ton Ton” Laguerre and Joseph “Ti Wouj” Senatus, two master drummers in Miami’s Haitian community. Photographs showed Laguerre and Senatus covering the drums in a churchyard in Little Haiti and performing with Sosyete Koukouy, a multidisciplinary arts organization that presents folkloric dances and dramas. An audiotape offered examples of Rada and Petwo rhythms. A highlight of this

section was a ritual room designed by Carole Demesmin and Margaret Armand, two *manbos* (Vodou priestesses) in South Florida. Demesmin and Armand arranged the room for a ceremony for Ogou Feray, a lwa who is associated with strength and courage and is particularly important in the Miami community (Figure 10). Along with a set of Rada drums, this space included various other items symbolically associated with Ogou: his sequined flag, machete, *pakèt kongo* (tied bundle with feathers), and *vévè* (cornmeal floor drawing). A final part of this section included documentary material and instruments related to *misik rasin*, a form of contemporary Haitian music that draws on Vodou and other traditions.

In the exhibition’s Trinidadian section, we examined both steelbands and East Indian-derived percussion traditions. The first display dealt with the “tuning” (fabricating) of pans. In a series of photographs, the Miami-based pan tuner/leader Michael Kernahan demonstrated the steps in tuning a tenor (lead) pan: the sinking of the bottom of a barrel, the grooving of sections for notes, the cutting of the barrel sides, the heating of the metal, and the hammering of each section to achieve a proper pitch. The completed pan was also displayed, along with some of Kernahan’s tools and supplies. A small steelband, with pans ranging from basses to tenors, was exhibited in a street-like setting with photomurals, audio/video recordings, and masquerade costumes from Miami’s Carnival, which is held on Columbus Day weekend and is one of the most popular in the Caribbean diaspora (Figure 11). Meanwhile, Indo-Trinidadian tassa drumming was represented by Romeo and the Boys, an ensemble led by Romeo Ragbir which plays frequently at Hindu weddings and festivals in South Florida. We exhibited the tassa drums, bass drum, and *jhanj* (cymbals) that constitute an ensemble, along with photographs and audio recordings. In addition, Ralph Rampersad, another musician, set up a room for a Hindu *puja* (prayer service). Along with images of Hindu deities and other ritual items, Rampersad included

Figure 10. *Caribbean Percussion Traditions in Miami* exhibition. Room installed by Carole Demesmin and Margaret Armand for a ceremony for Ogou Feray, a spirit in the Haitian Vodou pantheon. Image courtesy of the Historical Museum of Southern Florida.

the typical instruments used at pujas: a harmonium, a double-headed *dholak* drum, a *dhantal* (a metal rod played with a “U”-shaped striker), and *manjeera* (small cymbals).

The exhibition concluded with a street setting representing Junkanoo traditions in South Florida’s Bahamian community, which maintains close ties with the nearby Bahamian islands. For Boxing Day (December 26) and New Year’s Day, Miami Junkanooers frequently travel to the Bahamas to participate in the large Junkanoo processions in Nassau. In turn, Junkanooers from the Bahamas regularly join their counterparts in South Florida for processions held during the Goombay Festival each June in the old Bahamian section of Coconut Grove and during the Martin Luther King Day celebration in West Perrine, another neighborhood with a substantial Bahamian population. Our exhibition used photographs and videotapes from both festivals in an attempt to capture something of the intensity of the Junkanoo processions organized by Miami’s oldest Caribbean community. With assistance from the Bahamas Junkanoo Revue, the largest local group, we also displayed typical percussion instruments, such as goombay drums (metal containers covered with goatskin), tom toms (decorated tenor drums from a standard trap set), and cowbells (specially made with two or more bells attached to a single handle) (Figure 12). Also on display were examples of the elaborate costumes that Junkanooers wear as they “rush”—parade through the streets in rhythmic motions coordinated with their music.

Crucial to the success of *Caribbean Percussion Traditions* in Miami as an exhibition was the large archive of documentary materials produced by the fieldwork. Interviews, photographs,

Figure 11. *Caribbean Percussion Traditions* in Miami exhibition. Trinidadian steel pans displayed in front of a photomural of the 21st Century Steel Orchestra, performing in Miami’s Caribbean Carnival. Image courtesy of the Historical Museum of Southern Florida.

Figure 12. *Caribbean Percussion Traditions* in Miami exhibition. Photographic and video display of Bahamian Junkanoo. Also shown are a goombay drum (painted yellow), a decorated tom tom, cowbells, and other instruments. Image courtesy of the Historical Museum of Southern Florida.

and audio/video recordings made it possible to exhibit and interpret percussion traditions in terms of their complex cultural contexts: audiences could gain a sense of the fabrication, use, and significance of the instruments in a variety of local settings. Equally important to the exhibition, however, was the inclusiveness of its authorship. Exhibition content and design were developed over the course of more than a year by HMSF staff, researchers, and advisors from the communities represented. Gradually, the exhibition took shape as a collective production that incorporated a variety of voices, intellectual perspectives, and forms of creative expression. This range of voices was also represented in a series of concerts, workshops, and panel discussions that accompanied the exhibition.

In addition to shaping the exhibition itself, the project's collaborative arrangements had a long-term influence on HMSF as an institution. For the museum, the establishment of permanent archival and artifact collections related to Caribbean percussion indicated our affirmation of the value of this material and commitment to its preservation in perpetuity. For the percussionists and others who agreed to be documented and who provided artifacts, the collections constituted a personal investment in the museum. These relationships, in turn, generated other HMSF projects involving contemporary Caribbean life in Miami. For example, Willie Ramos, Ezequiel Torres, and Nelson Mendoza served as guest curators for another fieldwork-based exhibition, *At the Crossroads: Afro-Cuban Orisha Arts in Miami* (2001), while Romeo Ragbir and Ralph Rampersad helped to coordinate the *Indo-Caribbean Community Arts Project* (2000), in which high school students from this community in South Florida documented their traditions through photography and videography and produced an exhibition. In short, partnerships developed during the Caribbean percussion project facilitated ongoing community engagement with the museum and the use of the museum as a shared space for interpreting and preserving evidence of diverse Caribbean experiences in Miami.

Caribbean Public History in Miami

As the above review suggests, HMSF's archives and exhibitions are wide ranging in the perspectives that they offer on Caribbean history and artistic traditions. The three exhibitions described here each offered audiences in Miami a framework for more fully understanding the Caribbean and its transnational significance in the development of Florida and the wider Atlantic world. *Visions of the Caribbean* sketched a broad expanse of Caribbean history, including various events directly related to Florida: the Spanish colonization of the peninsula in the sixteenth century, Spain's transfer of Florida to Britain (in return for Cuba) at the end of the Seven Year's War (1756-1763), the threat of the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) to slavery throughout the Americas, the smuggling and the escapes of enslaved Africans in Florida following the abolition of the slave trade by Britain and the United States (1807-1808), the role of Cuban exile communities in Florida in the second Cuban War of Independence (1895-1898), the U.S.'s launching of troops from Florida during its intervention in this war (1898), and

patterns of U.S. tourism to and labor migration from the Caribbean during the early twentieth century. In contrast to these developments over the course of several centuries, *Calypso: A World Music* focused on a few decades during which one form of Trinidadian music affected popular culture in locales throughout the Atlantic world, including several nightclubs in Miami that featured Bahamian and Jamaican calypso artists during the 1950s. In tracing this international influence, the exhibition also demonstrated how visual representations of calypso in the mass media drew on imagery that had long been used by Europeans and North Americans to depict the Caribbean. Finally, *Caribbean Percussion Traditions in Miami* examined the re-creation of Caribbean musical and other expressive traditions in one diasporic city in recent years. Most important, this exhibition provided a forum in which musicians and religious practitioners could share knowledge of traditions that are frequently misunderstood, even in South Florida.

While some of these stories could be learned through written sources, the visual quality of exhibitions and their existence in three-dimensional space (with the exception of online productions) exert a special power that can dramatically increase public awareness of their subject matter. The collective experience of coherently designed arrangements of images and artifacts stimulates new kinds of dialogue and learning among exhibition visitors. Museums thus play a critical role in increasing knowledge of topics that receive limited attention in contemporary discourse and are in danger of being ignored or forgotten.

Ideally, museums serve as public spaces in which a variety of peoples and collections intersect. When attuned to their particular social environments, museums offer resources with which the members of their communities can expand their perspectives on processes of change that have shaped their lives. At the Historical Museum of Southern Florida, we have advocated a transnational orientation and have constructed collections and exhibitions that encourage public inquiry into the Caribbean past and its significance for contemporary life in Miami and beyond.

Notes

¹The Historical Association of Southern Florida opened its first museum in 1962. The museum moved to a second location in 1972 and opened at its current site in 1984.

²I co-curated *Visions of the Caribbean* with Rebecca Smith (HMSF Curator of Research Materials) and Dawn Hugh (HMSF Archives Manager), and co-curated *Calypso: A World Music* with Ray Funk (a private collector). This essay is greatly indebted to these three individuals.

³See, for example, Alissandra Cummins, “Exhibiting Culture: Museums and National Identity in the Caribbean;” and “Caribbean Museums and National Identity;” Richard Price and Sally Price, “Executing Culture: Musée, Museo, Museum;” B.W. Higman, *Writing West Indian Histories*; David V. Trotman, “Public History, Landmarks and Decolonization in Trinidad;” Anita M. Waters, *Planning the Past: Heritage Tourism and Post-Colonial Politics at Port Royal*; and Verene Shepherd, “The Monument as Public Archive: Implications of the Jamaica National Heritage Trust’s ‘War Memorial Project.’”

⁴For examples of the growing literature on Caribbean visual history, see John Gilmore, *Glimpses of Our Past: A Social History of the Caribbean in Postcards*; Veerle Poupeye, Caribbean Art); John E. Crowley, “Picturing the Caribbean in the Global British Landscape;” Krista A. Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque*; and Patricia Mohammed, “Gendering the Caribbean Picturesque.” For a discussion of the ideologies that underlie representations of the Caribbean, see Gordon K. Lewis, *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought: The Historical Evolution of Caribbean Society in Its Ideological Aspects, 1492-1900*.

⁵See Crowley, “Picturing the Caribbean,” and Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*, for discussions of the use of the picturesque in the defense of the plantation system.

⁶Ogilby copied this illustration from Arnoldus Montanus’s *De Nieuwe en Onbekende Weereld* (Amsterdam, 1671).

⁷For a catalog of the work of Frédéric Mialhe, see Emilio Cueto, *Mialhe’s Colonial Cuba* (Miami, Fla.: Historical Association of Southern Florida, 1994).

⁸See Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics*, for a detailed analysis of the role of visual representations in the development of tourist industries in Jamaica and the Bahamas.

⁹Joanne Hyppolite, HMSF’s Curator for Community Research, organized this programming.

¹⁰The project advisory committee included Kenneth Bilby, Geraldine Connor, John Cowley, Donald Hill, Errol Hill, Gordon Rohlehr, and Keith Warner. Ray Allen and Sandra Pouchet Paquet collaborated with HMSF to organize associated public conferences in Brooklyn and Miami respectively. The traveling exhibition ended its tour in May 2008, while the online

exhibition will remain accessible through June 2009. Funding for the project was provided in part by two grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

¹¹For examinations of calypso outside Trinidad during the mid-twentieth century, see John Cowley, “Cultural ‘Fusions’: Aspects of British West Indian Music in the USA and Britain 1918-51;” and “London is the Place: Caribbean Music in the Context of Empire 1900-60;” Donald R. Hill, “‘I Am Happy Just to Be in This Sweet Land of Liberty’: The New York City Calypso Craze of the 1930s and 1940s;” Michael Eldridge, “There Goes the Transnational Neighborhood: Calypso Buys a Bungalow;” and Ray Funk and Donald R. Hill, “‘Will Calypso Doom Rock ‘n’ Roll?’: The U.S. Calypso Craze of 1957.”

¹²Geraldine Connor organized the Leeds conference, while Sonja Dumas and Joan Osborne organized the conference in Port of Spain. A selection of papers from the Miami conference appears in Sandra Pouchet Paquet, Patricia J. Saunders, and Stephen Stuempfle, eds., *Music, Memory, Resistance: Calypso and the Caribbean Literary Imagination* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2007).

¹³The development of calypso-related photographic archives continues in Trinidad. For example, the National Pan History Project, directed by Kim Johnson, involves the collection of photographs and other illustrations of steelbands in Trinidad and around the world.

¹⁴Scholarship on Caribbean music has greatly increased over the past two decades. Two useful points of entry into this literature are Dale A. Olsen and Daniel E. Sheehy, eds., *South America, Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean, The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* and Peter Manuel with Kenneth Bilby and Michael Largey, *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae*.

¹⁵Fieldworkers for the project included Miguel “Willie” Ramos, Joanne Hyppolite, Nina Wood, Nelson Mendoza, Ana Negron, and myself. The project was funded in part by two grants from the National Endowment for the Arts.

¹⁶The practitioners of the Yoruban-derived Orisha religion (sometimes called “Santería”) in Miami are primarily Cuban, though there are also participants of various other backgrounds.

¹⁷Puerto Rican musicians in Miami also play *bomba*, a percussive music/dance genre, though they typically use congas rather than traditional *bomba* drums.

¹⁸The Rada division is West African in origin, while the Petwo is associated with the Kongo and the experience of slavery in Haiti.

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