

Introduction

The title of this book describes a contradiction. Roots signify a long, rich, and complex history that is the basis for growth. Flowers signify the continuing affirmation of life: truly new and beautiful things. The two are connected in a rhythm of life, death, and rebirth. The most wonderful time is the spring, when a tree's roots explode energy through the organism and the tree gives birth to a new season of blossoms. This is one way to think of the Cuban revolutionary process: it was a historical spring out of which there was a flowering of new things.

We are writing about a couple of inter-connected themes. One is that the Afro-Cuban experience is not marginal to Cuban history but rather has its origin in one of Cuba's three fundamental roots: Spanish, Indian, and African. This is true in terms of demographics, politics, culture, and soul. Without Africa, there would be no Cuba as we know it. However, this objective fact is not the whole story. The Afro-Cuban had to face the blatant degradation and exploitation of slavery under Spanish colonialism and then segregation and racist devaluation under US neocolonialism. This lasted for 450 years. The Cuban revolution is just over fifty years old. Do the math: the transformation isn't over yet.

We are also focusing on information and libraries. Nothing is more central to the democratic character of a society than how it handles information and what its libraries do. The prerequisite for mass participation in the life of a society is an educated population with access to information. This is done most typically through key institutions, the library in particular. This book is about one person's path through the library, a journey that has lasted sixty-three years and counting. It focuses on the tensions between sustainability and innovation, between standardization to global norms and decolonization to affirm national integrity. In short, tensions between yesterday and tomorrow. The sixty-three years spans the coming to power of Fidel Castro and the July 26 Movement.¹ It also includes the onset of the digital revolution, with the emergence of people using computers to transform information practices. The people and the library converge in our focus on the life of the Afro-Cuban librarian Marta Terry González.

Marta is an eminent librarian of the Cuban revolution, having at various times been the librarian of record for institutions led by Che Guevara, Haydée Santamaría, Armando Hart, and (at the National Library) under the leadership of Fidel Castro. She herself has been a leader in both the Cuban and the international library world.

The authors became involved in learning and then telling this story when Kate met and interviewed Marta in 2001. We interviewed Marta in Cuba, Canada, and the United States. Beginning in 2001, we made eight trips to Cuba, where we spoke with her and others. Marta told her story in an improvisational fashion, giving us a series of dots to connect as best we could. We added what aspects of Cuban librarianship we could learn about in US libraries, particularly in the rich collection of the University of Illinois, but also through the magic of interlibrary loan and the Internet. All three of us began to learn together. Marta very often corrected and expanded the text. She has been a guest in our home. We met her in Toronto where she traveled to a joint American–Canadian library association meeting in 2003. She connected us to others who provided their perspectives: family members, friends,

¹ The July 26 Movement is named for date of the daring 1953 attack on the Moncada police barracks. The attack was beaten back and the rebels took many casualties, both immediately and under torture in prison. But it was a powerful moral blow, for it rallied a great many Cubans and helped to organize them into the strongest force in the movement against Batista. With an army and an underground organization, the July 26 Movement was able to seize power just six years later.

and colleagues, including Dr. Héctor Terry Molinert, Graziella Pogolotti, Julio Rodríguez-Luis, Nancy Morejón Hernández, Emilio Setién Quesada, Eliades Acosta Matos, Gloria Ponjuan Dante, and María Aurora Soto Balbón and others. Along the way, Marta's colleagues and others created Ecured, the Cuban Wikipedia, which we were excited about and grateful to discover. We learned from all of these. At the same time, any errors in the text are ours. We taped and transcribed, we searched and scanned. We lost material to a disastrous theft, but we reconstructed and managed.

What helped make this possible was our broader focus on Cuba. For Abdul, this began in 1957 when Bayamo native Mario Argote joined Abdul singing "Moody's Mood for Love" as they stood in line in their college cafeteria. The two of them then followed the Cuban revolution as closely as was possible from the small college town of Ottawa, Kansas.

Later, representing the Black Liberation movement, Abdul made several trips to Cuba with delegations from the United States. In 1972 he represented People's College as part of a tour for progressive university students and faculty, and made a report on the role of students in the Black Liberation struggle. After several subsequent solo visits, Abdul joined forces with Bill Sales² and Rosemari Mealy³ to organize the Havana conference "Malcolm X Speaks in the 1990s," bringing eighteen African Americans to participate.⁴

Kate first traveled to Cuba in 2001 with a Canadian-led tour organized for North American librarians. The group met Marta in the library she had founded and was directing, the Arca de Papel (Paper Arc) in the Cuban Book Institute. Kate later parted from the tour group in order to speak further with Marta and others in library studies and informatics. The resulting photo report helped provide context for North Americans to understand the then-current battle over Cuban libraries.⁵ Marta was a key protagonist in that battle, defending Cuba's libraries, librarians and, in fact, sovereignty. This story is told in chapter 10 and (in Marta's own words) in the documents included in the appendices.

When Marta succeeded in travelling to IFLA Boston—the annual meeting of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions—in August 2001, Kate and Abdul invited her to the Midwest. Marta visited the Detroit Public Library, lunched with faculty from the University of Michigan's School of Information where Kate was then a doctoral student, and toured JSTOR, the project to digitize and store entire runs of academic journals. She also spent time at the University of Toledo, where Abdul was director of the Africana Studies program, and in the community with staff and volunteers of the Murchison Center, a local community technology center where we worked with residents and students on digital literacy, gardening, and school reform.⁶

In 2002, we accepted an invitation to share the experience of the Murchison Center at Cuba's

² See: William W. Sales, *From Civil Rights to Black Liberation: Malcolm X and the Organization of Afro-American Unity* (Boston: South End Press, 1994).

³ See: Rosemari Mealy, *Fidel & Malcolm X: Memories of a Meeting* (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1993).

⁴ Video, audio and text from the conference is available online. Abdul Alkalimat, "Malcolm X Habla En Los 90's / Malcolm X Speaks in the 90's," Malcolm X: A Research Site, http://www.brothermalcolm.net/2002/mx_1990/.

⁵ Kate Williams, "Literacy and Computer Literacy: The Cuban Experience: Report on a Library Tour of Cuba, February-March 2001 / Alfabetización Y Computadorización: La Experiencia Cubana: Informe Sobre Un Viaje De Bibliotecarios a Cuba, Febrero-Marzo 2001," Kate Williams faculty Web page, <http://people.lis.illinois.edu/~katewill/cuba/>.

⁶ Abdul Alkalimat and Kate Williams, "Social Capital and Cyberpower in the African American Community: A Case Study of a Community Technology Center in the Dual City," in *Community Informatics: Shaping Computer Mediated Social Relations*, ed. Leigh Keeble and Brian Loader (London: Routledge, 2001), 178-204.

International Congress on Information, INFO 2002. A nine-person delegation from the University of Toledo and the Murchison Center traveled to Havana to speak at the conference and see our counterparts in Cuba.⁷

Both of us are faculty at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign—Abdul emeritus from the Department of Afro-American Studies and the Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS), Kate an associate professor at GSLIS. As we complete this biography of a librarian, the school is considering dropping the word “library” from its name. This reflects a global crisis: public cultural institutions are seeing surging demand, yet are also fighting for funding and for their continued existence. Libraries are inclusive institutions for entire populations. “Big data” research—including that carried on in the same academic unit as library and information studies—serves corporations and governments. This book is also an argument for examining, sustaining and, where necessary, reinventing the libraries that serve a broad democratic role involving literacy, popular education, and recreation in local communities.

Who should read this book? First and foremost, this is a book about the Cuban Revolution, a narrative about people and one particularly important cultural institution. Anyone interested in Cuba will find this a good read. This is especially true for readers interested in racism and Afro-Cubans. This is also a book for librarians and library students. We need to see libraries in all sorts of contexts, for that is the modern world. The library as a memory institution can be reimagined as a nervous system of society, with its capacity for collecting, processing, storing, and sharing our recorded perceptions. Here is a story of the emergence of a modern library system aimed at decolonization and social justice. Librarians in the Global South,⁸ and many in the Global North serving immigrants from the South, will find this a useful study of their longtime colleague Marta Terry. And library students interested in social justice can use this book to understand an important example of a librarian who has made and is still making a sustained and creative contribution.

While it is not possible to completely separate the two topics, this book is in two parts: Marta the Afro-Cuban woman and Marta the librarian. Each part begins with an essay that provides context, which is especially crucial for readers not familiar with Cuba. Chapter 1 is an overview of the development of Cuban identity, focusing on the dialectics of the Afro-Cuban experience. Major signposts here are the ideas of José Martí and Fernando Ortiz. The rest of part 1 focuses on Marta’s family, education, and her joining the Cuban revolution. Chapter 2 examines six generations of Marta Terry’s family. It begins with her great-grandmother Marta O’Farrill, born of two African parents and born into slavery. It traces her lineage through her grandmother, her parents and aunts and uncles; her son and grandson. (Because her marriage emerged within a particular historical—and library—context, that story is told in chapter 6.) Chapter 3 is about Marta’s education. Home schooled until age ten, she was enrolled early in high school where she earned her *bachillerato*. She then continued on through the University of Havana and the State Teachers College at New Paltz (in upstate New York), eventually earning a doctorate at the former. At the university she joined and shaped a network of friends that has endured all her life. Chapter 4 explains how she joined the revolutionary movement against the Batista regime soon after her University of Havana experience.

⁷ Documents from the trip are available online. University of Toledo Africana Studies Program, "Toledo Spiders Go to Cuba," Murchison Center, <http://murchisoncenter.org/cuba/>.

⁸ The Global South is a term that very broadly identifies the parts of the world which were subjugated and colonized by the European powers after 1500. People and countries in the Global South have since taken a variety of paths towards freedom and equality, but within a context of continued subjugation (cultural, economic, political, and military) by the Global North, especially the US and Western Europe.

Part 2 begins with chapter 5, which tells the story of how systems of information and communication, especially libraries, developed in Cuba. Early aspects emerged during Spanish rule, and further developed under American rule by proxy, the Cuban struggle against these two, and then Cuban independence (and the US blockade) beginning in 1959. The rest of part 2 focuses on Marta Terry the librarian, while also touching on aspects of her life during those professional years. For the majority of her working years she has directed three important libraries: at JUCEPLAN (1961–1967), Casa de las Américas (1967–1987), and the José Martí National Library (1988–1997). Chapter 6 discusses her experience at JUCEPLAN, or Junta Central de Planificación, the Central Planning Board of the Cuban economy led by Che Guevara, among others. It also describes her meeting there and marrying the young engineer Luis Antonio Forte Manilla. Chapter 7 tells how she ran the José Echevarría Library at Casa de las Américas (House of the Americas). There she worked with Casa's founding director, Haydée Santamaría, who led the way in building Casa into a destination and resource for writers and readers—for cultural and political innovators—from across Latin America. Chapter 8 covers the ten years Marta served as director of the José Martí National Library. This time spanned the collapse of the Soviet Union and the ensuing Cuban economic crisis known as the Special Period in Time of Peace, and yet the library system carried on. Chapter 9 is about Marta's experience as a founding professor—although always part-time—of the Department of Library and Information Science at the University of Havana. Marta's five decades of service to IFLA are detailed in Chapter 10. Starting as a young librarian in an IFLA training, Marta rose to being elected vice president and finally honorary fellow of IFLA, one of only twenty-seven so named.⁹ Among her achievements during this decade was the first IFLA meeting in Latin America—in Havana. Another of her achievements was repelling an extended US government attack on Cuba and its libraries, orchestrated through isolated American librarians but also including various agents in Havana and elsewhere. Chapter 11 deals with her more recent experiences establishing collections in the Cuban Book Institute (1997–2007) and elsewhere. After retiring for the second time, she joined Armando Hart Dávalos, the early urban combatant against Batista and past Minister of Education and of Culture, to help organize his archive and publish his collected works. So part 2 covers making the revolution (JUCEPLAN), connecting the revolution abroad (Casa), institutionalizing the revolution (national library), training professionals in the revolution (the university), defending the revolution (IFLA), and finally retiring in the revolution, which has meant continuing to contribute as a librarian, but in new ways.

⁹ International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, "Honorary Fellow," International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions Honours Awards Web Page, <http://www.ifla.org/honours-awards/honorary-fellow>.