

Cuban Pre-Revolutionary Cinema

Editor: Luciano Castillo

- More than 65,000 digital images
- From the Silent Era to the Revolution
- Press clippings, lobby cards, and numerous unpublished photos
- Includes a full run of the weekly magazine *Cinema*, 1935–1965 (1,424 issues)
- Full-text search functionality
- Scanned from the originals kept at the Cinemateca de Cuba, Havana

Scanned at the Cinemateca de Cuba in Havana, Cuba, this online primary-source collection documents the history and development of Cuban cinema from the Silent Era to the Revolution. It offers unique access to unpublished photographs, newspaper clippings, lobby cards, yearbooks, and a complete run of the weekly magazine *Cinema* (1935–1965), an obligatory starting point for any research on early Cuban cinema.

Background

This online collection, aimed at researchers and students as well as cinephiles, comprises documents that record the development of cinema in Cuba between 1902 and 1958, commonly referred to as the Republican Era.

The collection includes valuable photographs—many of them unpublished—as well as historical film magazines, yearbooks, lobby cards, and clippings from the press of the time. They have been collected and preserved by the Cinemateca de Cuba since its foundation on 6 February 1960 by the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry (ICAIC), which itself was founded in March 1959, only a few months after the Revolution.

The organization of the collection allows researchers to study the people who tried to make films rather than the films they succeeded in making, and also to access the material by topic. The cinema produced in this period lived and died with each production company that was founded to carry out a project, many of them unsuccessful and others with insufficient distribution, which negatively impacted their ability to recoup their investment.



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Subject Areas

American Studies:

Latin America

Media Studies:

Television & Film

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Agramonte-Castillo collection

Another valuable component to this online resource is the Agramonte-Castillo collection, which was compiled in the first half of the twentieth century by cameraman-turned-historian Arturo Agramonte García (1925–2003). This collection contains biographical information from various sources on producers, directors, distributors and other people involved in the film industry. It formed the basis for Agramonte's monumental *Cronología del cine Cubano*, which was published in four volumes between 2011 and 2016 and was co-written by the author of this introduction text.



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Cinema magazine

Included in this collection is a complete run of the weekly magazine *Cinema*. The appearance of its first issue on 1 December 1935 was the most notorious event in Cuba's otherwise arid film scene of the mid-1930s. Its director was the Madrid-born Enrique Perdices Yubero (1901–1979), who lived in Havana. Together with his brother Antonio, he worked on the monthly publication *Civilización*, the official organ of the Asociación Nacional de Exhibidores, which was also founded in 1935. Enrique Perdices, a film buff from a young age, was involved in the production of several films until he joined Antonio and Ramón Peón in the important B.P.P. Pictures Company, where he became the executive producer of two feature films: *El veneno de un beso* (1929) and *La Virgen de la Caridad* (1930), directed by the pioneer Ramón Peón. After B.P.P. Pictures closed its business, Perdices began to devote himself to cinema through journalism.

One of a kind

Cinema, initially published as a supplement to *Civilización*, was priced at five cents and promoted as “one of a kind.” Its offices were at Calle Gervasio no. 118, altos, in Central Havana. Its editor-in-chief was Antonio Suárez Gómez. The cover of the first issue showed a photograph of the leading couple of the Spanish film *Vidas rotas* (1935), which was to premiere on 10 December at the Campoamor theater. The Film Criticism section was edited by the photographer Ricardo Delgado, who, among other films, reviewed *Alas sobre el Chaco* (1935), directed by Christy Cabanne for Universal Pictures. María M. Garrett, appointed *Cinema*'s New York correspondent, sent in reports on Hollywood show business, while Ramón Peón dispatched his contributions from Mexico.

Cinema, which became the official organ of the Unión Nacional de Empresarios de Cuba, is the only publication of its kind in Cuba with an uninterrupted circulation for three decades. The magazine paid constant attention to the many initiatives to launch a national film industry, which was ignited with each new film produced, only to peter out again later.

Obligatory starting point

To consult the entire *Cinema* collection is to trace the history of Cuban cinema step by step, from its most hesitant or misguided efforts to the more firm and promising ones. *Cinema* is an obligatory starting point for any research on early Cuban cinema. An examination of the 1,424 issues published up to August 1965 is to go through, week by week, a history full of lights and shadows. In his editorial column *Son cosas nuestras*, Perdices always showed an unabated generosity in the promotion of Cuban films. From the inaugural issue onward he undertook a crusade to engage successive governments of the Republic in supporting a national film industry, which so many dreamers aspired to but never achieved.

During all this time, innumerable film publications appeared in Cuba, almost all of them short lived. Only *Cinema* was able to maintain its publication schedule week after week for thirty years. We owe this immeasurable treasure to the tenacity of Enrique Perdices, who brought together a group of like-minded collaborators, and, above all, to his overflowing passion for a genuine national cinema.

Luciano Castillo
Director, Cinemateca de Cuba