SPAIN-FLORIDA: PERSPECTIVES ON A COMMON HISTORY. SPANISH CULTURE IN THE UNITED STATES

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Introduction

This presentation is part of a broader review on the state of current relationships between Spain and Florida, and aims to examine the different aspects of these interactions so as to assess their strengths and weaknesses and establish common cultural policies. These relationships are always justified by a historical background that will also prove decisive in the future. Nevertheless, we will not be delving into the past, and will focus on the current situation of relationships that have unquestionably shaped our common history. To this end, we will highlight the existence of a common cultural history shared by Spain and the United States that has become more intense in present times, and we will refer to some of the cultural exchanges that take place over the Atlantic. Therefore, we by no means aim to present a comprehensive list, but merely intend to demonstrate how the relationships between both countries survive, bypassing historical and political contingencies and economic circumstances. I will also focus on some of the landmark institutions that have enabled the creation of a stable framework for cultural and social relationships on either side of the Atlantic. However, I will refrain from historical considerations, which have been studied extensively by other authors, and will concentrate on the current state of affairs, with a view to proving that history has provided us with a fertile background that we cannot escape, and that we should actually tap into to learn more about the cultural fusion that emerges from those interactions. I will be confining this address to cultural and communicative exchanges that are directly linked to contemporary Spain, despite their close connection to the Hispanic and Latino world, since it would be impossible to list the enormous amount of initiatives related to the Spanish-speaking world in the United States.

These two-way cultural exchanges have taken shape in a host of expressions (institutional and diplomatic, linguistic, historical, university, associative, etc.), which are, in my opinion, a reflection of a dynamic relationship that is open to influences from either side of the ocean. As aforementioned, these exchanges can lay the foundations for establishing further political and economic policies that enable the recuperation of understanding and the building of good relationships between two countries that have a lot to offer each other: on the one side, the USA’s pivotal global economic and political role; and, on the other, Spain’s important history and cultural legacy, which have allowed the country to take decisive steps in planning the future, despite the current crisis. The number of activities that are programmed regularly confirm the vitality of these relationships, as we will see further on. I will focus primarily on relationships between Spain and southern US States, and particularly on the State of Florida. These interactions are fuelled by institutions, media and universities to promote Spanish culture here and to take stock of the cultural presence of Spain and Spanish heritage in this part of the world.
1. Spanish cultural action in the US

The United States has always shown an interest towards Spanish culture. Several initiatives were already set up in the early 20th century to demonstrate the importance of Spanish culture. The prestigious Hispanic Society of America, founded in New York City in 1904 by Archer Milton Huntington, is a premier example. This society is a museum and reference library for the study of the arts and cultures of Spain, Portugal and Latin America. Dr. Gregorio del Amo, born in Spain and naturalized as a US citizen, also broke some ground when he created the Del Amo Foundation in 1929 in Madrid’s Ciudad Universitaria campus to encourage cultural and academic exchanges between Spain and the State of California.

It took Spanish cultural activities some time to flourish and find their feet in the United States, at least as regular, scheduled actions. During the transition to democracy, Spain renovated its interest in the American continent, creating new organizations and institutions with a focus on culture and outreach, and embarking on new initiatives.

The former Instituto de Cultura Hispánica (Institute for Hispanic Culture), founded in 1946 –in the midst of Franco’s autarchy– to bridge the gap between Latin American countries, was reconverted into the Instituto de Cooperación Iberoamericana (Ibero-American Cooperation Institute) in 1979. This new institute was set up to gear the Latin American policy towards strengthening Spain’s traditional relationships with that part of the world, and to promote international cooperation, thereby boosting Spain’s contribution to development. With this in mind, the Secretary of State for International Cooperation and Latin America was created in 1985 within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Ten years after its creation in 1988, the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation was renamed the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation. North America has obviously never been a target for Spain’s AECID, which concentrates on countries that need development cooperation and operates primarily in other areas of the world and the American continent, particularly in South America, Central America and the Caribbean, i.e. Ibero-American countries. The Spanish Cultural Centre for Ibero-American Cooperation in Miami is the only centre in the Spanish international cooperation network on US soil. We will refer to this centre further on.

Cultural and economic relationships with the United States have been developed under other national institutions, such as the Cervantes Institute, the US-Spain Council, the Spain-USA Foundation, Spanish cultural centers, professional and academic associations, universities and research centers, companies, etc. These institutions scheduled an intense program of cultural activities during the 1990s, and have been instrumental to creating a vital and dynamic cultural agenda that has raised awareness regarding Spain in the United States and, even, in the Ibero-American world. Therefore, it was quite surprising to read that Spanish culture had a low impact on Hispanic countries in 2005 according to data from the Elcano Institute.  

1 http://www.hispanicsociety.org/


3 Two other interesting conclusions can be drawn from the research performed by the Elcano Institute (Latinobarómetro, 2005): firstly, that 72% of the Latin American population knew nothing or little about Spanish culture and its manifestations; secondly, that despite being the largest recipient of Spanish direct investment in Latin America, Brazil has a negative opinion regarding these inflows (2005: 16 and 20).
Cervantes Institute

After the Cervantes Institute was founded in 1991, centers were opened in Albuquerque, Chicago, Boston, New York, and Seattle, the latter in 2010. The institution is involved in promoting Spanish language and Spanish culture, and supporting North American Hispanicists. The Albuquerque center, in New México, accommodates the National Hispanic Culture Center, a division of the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs, which is firmly dedicated to the New Mexican environment. This centre for Hispanic culture, created by the US Government and State of New Mexico, develops cultural activities linked to Spanish and Latin American cultures.

The Cervantes Institute has a firm commitment with the United States, as stated recently by its director, Víctor García de la Concha, permanent member of the Royal Spanish Academy, speaking to the Mercurio magazine last September. According to García de la Concha, the Cervantes Institute has an ambitious plan to reach the top universities in the United States. His statement reveals that the most representative and wide-spread Spanish cultural institution (with centers in 44 countries) has set its sights on the United States.

US-Spain Council and Spain-USA Foundation

The Spain-USA Foundation was established in 1997 as a counterpart to the US-Spain Council, both located in Washington. These are organizations in which corporate leaders, leaders in culture and education, government officials and representatives of the political parties promote stronger ties between Spain and the United States in a range of fields: economy, finance, culture, education, politics and business. They also play an instrumental role advising the respective governments on actions to develop to improve relationships between both countries. The board of the foundation includes executives from financial institutions and companies in the United States. The Foundation, in cooperation with the Council, organizes an annual forum that alternates each year between the United States and Spain. This June the forum took place in Hoboken (New Jersey), and previous editions were scheduled around the US, with a focus on the south of the country: Santa Fe (New Mexico), 1999; Washington, 2002 and 2010; Miami, 2004; Tampa, 2006; and Houston, 2008. The Council is chaired by Senator Robert Menén dez, and Juan Rodríguez Inciarte chairs the Foundation.

The Spain-USA Foundation

The Spain-USA Foundation was established in 1999 in Washington to promote, support and develop a wide array of Spanish cultural and educational activities that proved to be of interest for both countries, and particularly to the Hispanic community in the United States, and to act as a bridge with Latin America. The Foundation is chaired by the Ambassador of Spain in the United States. The Spain-USA Foundation also works with the Spain, Arts & Culture Program.

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4 http://www.nhccnmm.org/
5 Mercurio, no. 143, September 2012, p. 8.
6 http://www.usspaincouncil.org; and www.spainusafoundation.org.
7 http://www.spainusafoundation.org/
Spain, Arts & Culture Program

Presented last February in Washington, the 2012 Spain, Arts & Culture Program aims to promote Spanish arts and culture in 18 US cities. Jointly organized by the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, and the Cervantes Institute, the program will promote Spanish heritage and the latest creative trends and innovation in Spanish culture. In Florida, the program will be carried out in Miami. From September to January, the Spanish Centre in Miami will host performances by Microteatro, an interactive theatre troupe; the New Spanish Film Festival took place at the Miami Beach Cinematheque between October 4 and 9; alongside a panel on post-digital creation in Spain at the Spanish Centre in Miami; between November 8 and 11, the Olympia Theater at the Gusman Center for the Performing Arts in Miami will host the Recent Spanish Cinema Series show, which has been running in Los Angeles since 1994, as an initiative launched by the Spanish Institute of Cinematography and Audiovisual Arts, within the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, and the American Cinematheque Los Angeles, the Miami International Film Festival, and the Spanish Audiovisual Producer’s Rights Management Association; Spanish singers Joaquín Sabina and Juan Manuel Serrat will be performing at the American Airlines Arena on November 16; and there will be Spanish food tastings at Café Xixon in Miami.

The Foundation maintains and finances the professional cultural network Spain Red, network of professionals of Spanish culture in the United States. Founded in November 2011 by the Cultural Office of the Embassy of Spain, this network was created “as an informative service to share creations by Spanish artists in the US, and as a service to provide a space for conversation between artists and with potential investors, event planners and sponsors.”

The Spanish Cultural Center in Miami

This is the only foreign cooperation institution within the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) in the United States. These cultural centers prepare, coordinate and perform actions in the field of cultural and scientific cooperation. The Spanish Cultural Centre for Ibero-American Cooperation in Miami was established in 1996, and its main lines of action keep in with Spain's cultural policy abroad. Its mission is “to contribute through culture and science to social and human development in south Florida, as well as to promote the exchange and free access for all sectors of the population.” The center has a vibrant annual program, and works with a host of institutions.

The Spain-Florida Foundation 500 Years

The Spain-Florida Foundation 500 Years was founded in 2009 to highlight Spain’s contribution in the creation of the United States. One of the foundation’s main objectives is the recognition of the Hispanic culture, economy and science in Florida, as well as in the rest of the United States.

2. Associations

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8 http://www.spainred.us/

9 El País, 4 November 2011.

10 http://ccemiami.org/
The proliferation of Spanish associations and centers throughout US territory (67) demonstrates how active the Spanish community is in this country, and is also quite telling of their integration in the territory.\(^\text{11}\) The States of California (18) and Florida (17) are home to the highest number of Spanish associations. The following associations can be found in the State of Florida:

**Miami:** Casa de Cantabria, Casa de España de Santa Marta de Ortigueira, Centro Asturiano de Miami, Club Vasco, Hogar Canario, Amigos de Madrid, and Real Club Social Deportivo Español.

**Coral Gables:** Casal Catalá, Centro Asturiano, and Centro Cultural Español (AECID).

**Hialeah:** Casa Gallega.

**Fern Park:** Casa de España de la Florida Central.

**Jacksonville:** Asociación Española del Norte de Florida.

**Tampa:** Club Ibérico Español, Centro Español, Centro Asturiano, and Centro Asturiano Place.

Moreover, Spain has a long trajectory in the US, and has a strong presence in the association sphere, with institutions dating back to the 1960s. These associations are linked to academic and scientific circles in universities and have played a pivotal role in organizing scientific conferences to promote Spanish language and culture in the United States. In addition, the Spanish departments in universities located throughout the whole of North America, but primarily in universities in the south of the country, also program a range of interesting activities.

According to data from the Portal del Hispanismo of the Cervantes Institute, the most important US associations for the study of Spanish and Latin American culture are: American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, based in Michigan; Asociación Puertorriqueña de Profesores de Español, based in San Juan; Association for Hispanic Classical Theater (1984), based in Maryland; California Association for Bilingual Education, based in California; Chicano Humanities and Arts Council (1978), based in Denver; Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (1986), based in Texas; Ibero-American Society for Eighteenth-Century, based in Michigan, Latin American Studies Association (1966), based in Pennsylvania; Modern Language Association of America. Division of Hispanic Literatures, based in New York; National Association of Hispanic and Latino Studies, based in Maine; Oregon Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, based in Oregon; Society for Renaissance & Baroque Hispanic Poetry, based in Texas; Society of Spanish and Spanish-American Studies (1975), based in Philadelphia; Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese – West Virginia Chapter, based in Virginia; the Conference on Latin American History (1962), based in North Carolina.\(^\text{12}\) Other associations are the Spanish Institute, created in New York in 1954,\(^\text{13}\) the King Juan Carlos I Centre at New York University, the Circle of Ibero-American Poets and Writers, the Modern Language Association, and the Fundación de Cultura Hispánica de los Estados Unidos.\(^\text{14}\)

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\(^\text{13}\) [http://spanishinstitute.org/](http://spanishinstitute.org/)

Special attention should be paid to ALDEEU-Spanish Professionals in America, an interdisciplinary association created in 1980 with the mission to act as a cultural bridge between the US and Spain. The association will hold its XXXIII Assembly and International Conference in the city of St. Augustine, in April 2013, entitled “Huellas de la hispanidad en EEUU”\(^\text{15}\) in honor of Florida’s Quincentenary.

### 3. Universities

Many US universities foster the advancement of Spanish culture through their departments and Spanish centers. Nevertheless, quite often, Spanish culture is taken for or confused with Latino or Hispanic culture, given the transcendence of the Latin American migratory phenomenon in the United States. As well as undergraduate studies, universities also offer postgraduate studies in Spanish. The University of Texas at El Paso was the first to build Spanish into the MFA in Creative Writing with a bilingual curriculum. In 2007, New York University also set up a postgraduate in Spanish. This city is historically a meeting point for writers from the Spanish-speaking world. Most recently, the University of Iowa created a similar masters course\(^\text{16}\) in January 2012.

Gerardo Piña Rosales’s outstanding paper on North American universities and Spanish\(^\text{17}\) provides vast information on the efforts of Spanish and North American intellectuals to promote the advancement of Spanish in the United States, and lists associations and institutions. As such, it is a relevant source to complete our information.

Other worthy examples are the important bibliographical collection in the Hispanic library of Tulane University, in New Orleans; the Alameda Museum in San Antonio (Texas),\(^\text{18}\) created in 2007, and the University of South Florida’s Spanish Civil War Oral History Project.\(^\text{19}\) The project documented the response of the Tampa Spanish immigrant community to the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), with funds from the Spanish Ministry of Culture, the United States’ Universities and the Florida Humanities Council,\(^\text{20}\) based in Saint Petersburg. Created in 1973, the Florida Humanities Council is a subsidiary of the National Endowment for the Humanities and develops programs linked to the history and culture of Florida.

Other North American universities have developed projects about the Spanish Civil War, including the University of Illinois, the University of California, and the University of New México.\(^\text{21}\) The Spanish Civil War still attracts many associations, particularly thanks to the work carried out to document and research the event by the ALBA Association (Abraham Lincoln Brigade

\(^{15}\) [http://www.aldeeu.org/](http://www.aldeeu.org/)


\(^{18}\) [“La cultura hispana ya tiene su museo en Estados Unidos,” El País, 12 April 2007.](http://purl.fcla.edu/usf/dc/s39)

\(^{19}\) [http://purl.fcla.edu/usf/dc/s39. The entire collection that composes the project (photos, audios, objects, etc.) is on show in the USF Tampa Library Special Collections Reading Room.](http://purl.fcla.edu/usf/dc/s39)


\(^{21}\) [http://www.alba-valb.org/resources/references/links/#research](http://www.alba-valb.org/resources/references/links/#research)
Archives). Despite the Neutrality Act passed in 1935 and renovated in 1937 by President Roosevelt, some 3,000 US citizens formed the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and took part in the war alongside the Spanish Republican army. ALBA was created in 1978 to honor the memory and defend the values of those who volunteered to fight fascism. The archival collections are located at New York University’s Tamiment Library, and their activities take place throughout the United States and are available online. On May 15, 2012, ALBA co-hosted a tribute to volunteers from the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in Tampa with the University of Central Florida. The association publishes The Volunteer, an online newspaper founded by Brigade veterans that focuses on information about Spain.

4. Twin towns in Spain and the United States

Town twinning is a relatively recent event, since the first links were born in the aftermath of the Second World War to create ties between European populations. Although twinning is more frequent in Europe (as the European Union currently supports these projects), the movement has expanded to all continents and reveals the connection between people and cities all over the world. Most often historical, but sometimes cultural, these twinning initiatives are a reflection of a desire to advance common or shared projects.

Spanish towns are primarily twinned with cities in Florida and in other States in the south of the United States, given their common past. Florida has the most “twinned towns,” namely:

- Pensacola (Florida) and Macharaviaya (Andalusia, Spain)
- San Agustín (Florida) and Avilés (Asturias, Spain)
- Tampa (Florida) and Oviedo (Asturias, Spain)
- Coral Gables (Florida) and Granada (Andalusia, Spain)
- Miami Beach (Florida) and Marbella and Almonte (Andalusia, Spain)
- Miami (Florida) and Murcia (Murcia, Spain)
- Orlando (Florida) and Valladolid (Castile and Leon, Spain)

5. Cultural industries and the media

An in-depth analysis of the vast number of Spanish-speaking media in the United States (radio, television and digital publications) would require more space and time than we have today. As a quick overview, suffice to say that most media are US-owned and created for the Hispanic population in general. Spain’s presence in the sector depends mainly on the participation of the Prisa Group in Radio Caracol, and the agreement entered into in 2011 between The Huffington Post Media Group and El País to publish a Spanish edition of The Huffington Post, the US

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22 http://alba-valb.org/


24 http://www.huffingtonpost.es/
newspaper created by Arianna Huffington and Kenneth Lerer in 2005. The Spanish company’s popularity among the Hispanic community in the US played an important role in securing that agreement.

The field of cultural industries stands out thanks to initiatives undertaken by professionals from the audiovisual sector in Spain and the United States. In 2008, Miami hosted the 1 Foro de analistas y profesionales de medios audiovisuales, organized by the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Miami and the Santillana Foundation, to study Latino cultural industries in the United States with a special focus on music, cinema, arts and the media. The second edition was staged in Madrid in December 2010, organized by the Santillana Foundation and the Alternativas Foundation in partnership with the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Miami and the Reina Sophia National Museum and Art Centre. The event focused on Spanish-speaking cultural industries in the US and Spain with the mission to “promote exchanges and create a close connection between Spanish and US professionals to pave the way for potential joint projects for Latin audiences.”

As a conclusion

This has been an incomplete overview of the numerous cultural initiatives that contribute to promoting Spanish language, culture and civilization in the United States, with an emphasis on Florida, our main focal point. Indeed, we share a common history, and putting all these initiatives into perspective has revealed that a clear future lies ahead, fuelled by such a dynamic and vital present. We have attempted to deliver a representative sample of the vast range of initiatives that are carried out at present in this sense. Our mission is to continue working along these lines to present a complete analysis of the interactions existing between Spain and Florida in all fields. I would like to finish with one last nugget of information, Florida is home to 360 Spanish companies, 18 of which are first-class corporations (banks, media, electronics, IT, etc.). Therefore, culture and economy go hand in hand. We have strong political and geographical ties, and we must strive to continue and advance these interactions in the future.

25 http://www.fundacionsantillana.com/convocatorias/detalle/80/2-y-3-de-diciembre-encuentro-de-industrias-culturales-en-espanol-estados-unidos-y-espana/