

*A Biographical Essay to Accompany the Collection Deposited with
the George A. Smathers Libraries at the University of Florida*

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Perhaps no other Cuban journalist contributed more to democratizing the political culture of Cuba from the 1940s to the 1970s than Eduardo Hernández Toledo, universally known during his thirty-five year career as “Guayo.”

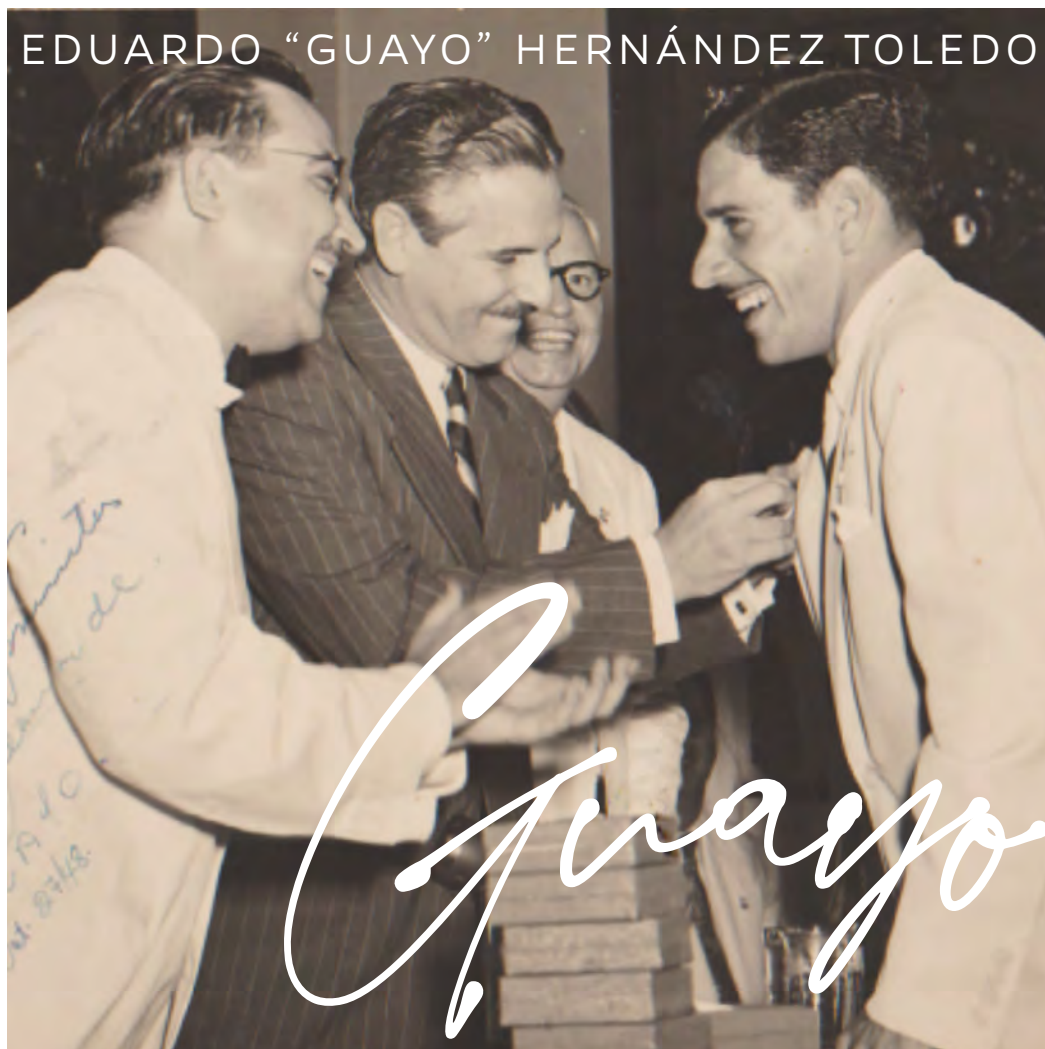


Fig 1.: The above image is when “Guayo” won a “Juan Gualberto Gómez” award in 1948, the highest journalistic accolade in Cuba. In this photo, he’s receiving the medal from Cuba’s president Carlos Prío Socarrás. “Guayo” won this award in multiple years.

Guayo empowered Cuban citizens with visual and documentary knowledge of current events in their country and Latin America as a freelance photographer and pioneering filmmaker. Fearless in his pursuit to inform the public and relentless in his desire to preserve the objectivity of the press, Guayo regularly put himself in the line of fire. This commitment meant that Guayo not only captured critical images at key moments of struggle, human suffering, natural catastrophes, state violence, revolution, and protest, but he also made viewers feel that they were equal witnesses to events, capable of seeing beyond official narratives to draw their own conclusions.

Born in Havana in 1916, Guayo first developed a life-long passion for photography when he tinkered with cameras for sale in his uncle's shop as a small child. Guayo was entirely self-taught and repeatedly received the Juan Gualberto Gómez Prize, among other national and international awards. Guayo was catapulted to the top of the journalistic profession in November 1942 when he ignored the Cuban government's ban on photography and filmed the final moments of a convicted Nazi spy's execution. The resulting higher quality stills deeply impressed Miguel Angel Quevedo, the owner-director of *Bohemia*, a legendary magazine with the largest circulation in Cuba and across Latin America. Quevedo then published them and began to rely on Guayo for the most important of *Bohemia's* missions. This included Guayo's unprecedented coverage of the disastrous 1944 hurricane as it hit Havana. Filming through the streets from the back of a station wagon, Guayo, his associate Manuel Alonso, and Alonso's brother braced 80 mph



Fig 2.: Che Guevara is shown extracting a tooth, May 1957.

winds by tying themselves together. This was likely the first time that Cubans were able to see this common Caribbean natural disaster in (almost) real time.

The next several years of Guayo's work reflect Quevedo and Guayo's commitment to creating a community of readers emboldened by the free press to believe that democratic change in Latin America was possible through their own actions and voicing of opinions. In September 1947, Guayo and radio broadcaster German Pinelli ignited a firestorm of outrage among the Cuban public when they filmed and narrated a three-hour standoff between rival armed gangs whose members had infiltrated Cuba's national police and armed forces at a home in the swanky Havana neighborhood of Orfila. The resulting radio broadcast and film shown in theatres, *The Battle of Orfila*, catalyzed collective protest against the elected but deeply corrupt Auténtico Party government of President Ramón Grau San Martín. In many ways, *Orfila* galvanized support for the opposition and launched a tidal wave of unarmed citizen protests that would be crushed by the military coup of General Fulgencio Batista five years later.



Fig 3.: Andrew St. George, Pedro Diaz Lanz, Teresa Casuso and Fidel Castro moments after Fidel gave St. George a gold medal for service to the Revolution, New York, April 1959.

The interim years of Guayo's career remain hallmarks of Cuba's political radicalization and the rise across the Caribbean and Central America of a movement to end the United States' imperial economic control of the region through the backing and, in some cases, the installation of violent military dictatorships. In 1948, for example, Guayo documented the massive popular riots that rocked Bogota when the popular anti-Communist, anti-imperialist Liberal Party leader Jorge Eliezer Gaitán was assassinated during the Ninth Pan American Conference, a pro-United States affair. Colombia's capital was reduced to ruins by protestors, which included Fidel Castro. After filming and documenting the riots that cost approximately 3,000 Colombian lives, Guayo left for Cuba on the same plane with Fidel Castro.

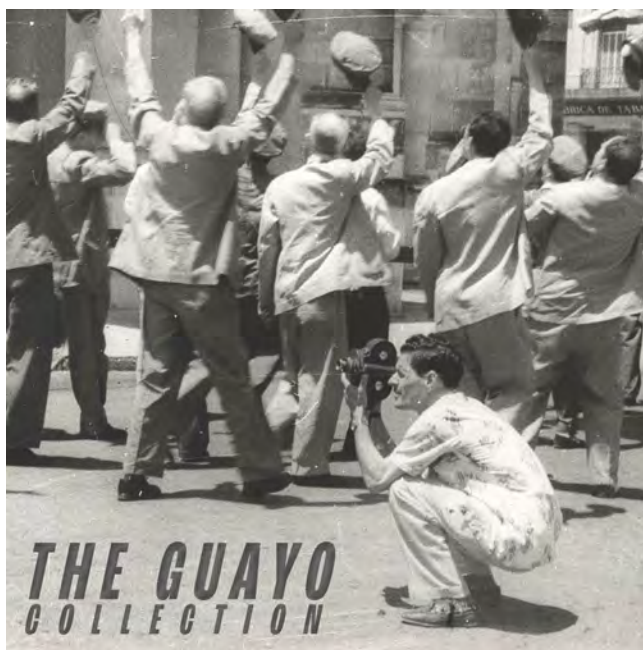


Fig 4.: Filming transportation workers marching in front of the old Presidential Palace, Cuba. Undated.

In the 1950s, Guayo reached the peak of his fame when he documented the destruction of the 1954 El Salvador earthquake. He also contributed to regional support for democratic elections that would thwart the power of the United States and its preferred model of dictatorship to protect plantation economies dominated by American monopolies like the United Fruit Company and local landowning elites. Guayo did this by regularly documenting the rise of the Caribbean Legion, an effort launched from Cuba to foment support for the ousting of nearby dictatorships. Guayo also became the first Cuban journalist to make the

dangerous trip across the mountains of eastern Cuba to the guerrilla hideout of Fidel Castro and the 26th of July Movement. The material Guayo gathered of this fateful period includes unique footage of the dictator Batista's self-promotional campaigns to create the illusion of public favor and footage and photographs of the caravan from Santiago to Havana

that Fidel Castro's movement organized to mark the Revolution's triumphant entry into power in January 1959.

The latter two decades of Guayo's productivity as a photojournalist mirrored the demise of democracy in Cuba in the summer of 1960 and the rise of a new Communist dictatorship under Fidel Castro in subsequent years. In August 1960, Guayo followed Quevedo into

THURSDAY, MARCH 21, 2024
WELCOME
JUDITH C. RUSSELL
DEAN OF UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
EDUARDO "GUAYO" HERNÁNDEZ:
VISUAL MEDIA & THE QUEST FOR CUBAN DEMOCRACY

On March 21, 2024, Dr. Lillian Guerra and Martha Kapelewski presented the Smathers Libraries newest collection.

The Eduardo “Guayo” Hernández collection contains documents, letters, newspaper articles, photographs, slides, correspondence, films, documentaries, and ephemera.




Fig 5.: Above - Dr. Margarita Vargas-Betancourt, Latin American and Caribbean Special Collections Librarian, Luis Hernández Abreu, and Martha Kapelewski, Special and Area Studies Collections Bilingual Processing Archivist.



The collection, donated by his son Luis Hernández Abreu, his brothers Eduardo “Guayito” Hernández Gabelas and Jorge Hernández Gabelas (in memoriam) as well as Guayo’s grandchildren and friends, is an invaluable resource that documents Cuba before, during, and after the revolution, covering counterrevolutionary missions to Cuba with Brigada 2506 and Alpha 66.

Fig 6.: Above - Patrons viewing slides featuring images at the event, CONVERSATIONS: The Guayo Collection, 2024. To watch a video of this event: <https://youtu.be/wRas7i9BM5E?feature=shared>.

exile in New York and later, Venezuela, where they launched a decade-long run of the magazine *Bohemia Libre* in a failed attempt to counter the propaganda machine of Cuba’s Communist state. Guayo also joined Alpha 66, an armed exile group (eventually financed by the CIA) in sixteen different missions to invade Cuba and attempt to topple the revolutionary state. After Quevedo’s death by suicide in 1968, Guayo moved to Puerto Rico where he became a founder of *El Nuevo Día*, the newspaper with the widest circulation on the island to this day. He then moved to Miami and helped found the Spanish-language version of the *Miami Herald*, later renamed *El Nuevo Herald*. In these years, Guayo photographed John F. Kennedy and First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy’s rally to honor Bay of Pigs veterans returning from prison in Cuba; Kennedy’s visit to Central America in 1963; the Constitutional Revolution of the Dominican Republic in 1965; Alpha 66’s 1970 landing in Cuba; an interview with Muhammad Ali on the eve of his historic boxing match with Joe Frazier in Miami in 1971; and police repression of student protests at the University of Puerto Rico-Rio Piedras in 1973.

As a witness and faithful documenter of the history of Cuba and the region of Central America and the Caribbean, Eduardo Hernández Toledo’s contributions are extraordinary. 

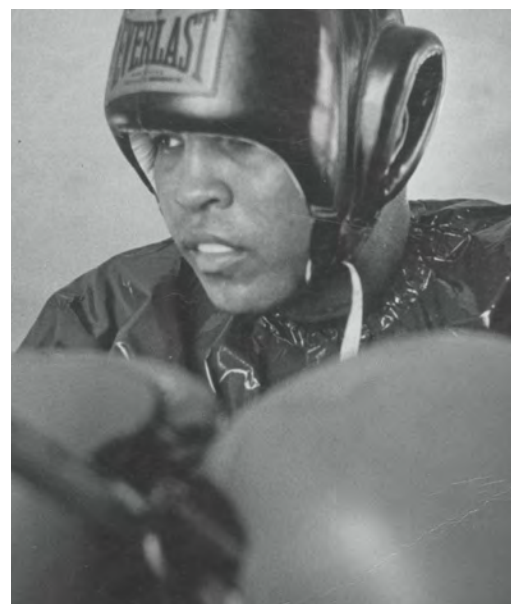


Fig 7.: Muhammad Ali, *El Miami Herald*, 1976.