The Sun Never Sets

Photographs and Prints of Cuba, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico from The Hispanic Society Museum and Library

How do photographs and prints shape what we see and understand about a place and its people? What happens when we look at images not simply as pictures, but as records shaped by who made them, why, and for whom?

The Sun Never Sets takes its title from the sixteenth-century refrain e*l imperio donde nunca se pone el sol*, "the empire where the sun never sets," which celebrated the global reach of the Spanish monarchy. But by the nineteenth century, Spain's imperial power was waning, even as photography and printmaking offered new ways to picture, circulate, and imagine its colonies.

The images gathered here depict Cuba, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico during the final decades of Spanish colonial rule. They show streets and harbors, plantations and public buildings, and the people who inhabited these spaces. Yet the images are not transparent windows onto colonial life. Commissioned and made largely by foreign illustrators, government officials, traveling photographers, and others whose identities and roles are not always fully known, they reflect particular perspectives and purposes rather than purely artistic points of view.

The Sun Never Sets places these visual records in conversation with the writings of Puerto Rican poet and independence activist Lola Rodríguez de Tió, Filipino revolutionary Andrés Bonifacio, and Cuban writer and revolutionary José Martí. Their words offer perspectives shaped by life under colonial rule and struggles for self-determination. To deepen the context surrounding the objects and histories represented here, the exhibition has also invited scholars and writers with specialized knowledge of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines to contribute their perspectives.

Bringing together these works and words, this exhibition invites us to look beyond the frame, listen for what is absent, and attend to what remains unsaid or un-pictured, thereby opening new ways of seeing, learning, and listening.

The Hispanic Society Museum and Library preserves the largest and earliest-known collection of daguerreotypes made in the Philippines, dating from 1844 to 1846. Its artistic value lies in the precision and beauty with which the pictures capture natural environments, architecture, commercial districts, Indigenous dwellings, local customs, and everyday life, while its historical importance rests in preserving a cultural heritage largely transformed or lost. Based on correspondences of dates, places, and individuals, and the extensive photographic work known to have been carried out in Asia by the French diplomat and customs officer Jules Itier, Itier is considered the most probable candidate for their authorship. The images reveal the complex development and circulation of photography through commercial, diplomatic, and cultural networks, positioning the Philippines as an intersection of global exchange.

—Noemí Espinosa, associate curator, Hispanic Society Museum and Library

What might these photographs tell us—and what might they conceal? The four daguerreotypes in this case can be read as records of places and people, but each is also a selective view shaped by its maker's position, purpose, and technology. Looking across them, consider what becomes visible through the camera and what remains outside its frame. What other histories might these seemingly documentary images hold?

Jules Alphonse Eugène Itier

French, 1802–1877

Landing Place and Floating Bridge of Taguig at the Entrance of the Laguna, Manila

Cabildo Government House

Rosario Street and Binondo Church

View from the Road Leading Out of Majayjay to Magdalena, Laguna Province

c. 1844–46

Daguerreotypes

On loan from The Hispanic Society of America, New York

Among the earliest known photographs of the Philippines, these four daguerreotypes offer glimpses of a society shaped by colonial rule and commerce. As a foreign diplomat, Jules Itier carried his camera as part of his travels and official knowledge gathering. His subjects ranged from centers of colonial authority to places where commerce and daily life intersected: Binondo Church, founded in 1596, served Chinese converts in Manila's commercial district; Taguig was a lakeside fishing community; and the cabildo was a seat of the Spanish government. Look closely at the view of the road from Majayjay to Magdalena. Decades later, Magdalena became a site of revolutionary struggle where Emilio Jacinto, a leader of the Katipunan, a secret society founded to fight Spanish rule, died in 1899. His story connects this landscape to the broader struggle for Philippine self-determination.

—Elisa Germán, Lunder Curator of Works on Paper and Whistler Studies, Colby College Museum of Art

Jules Alphonse Eugène Itier

French, 1802–1877

View of Pagsanjan, Laguna Province

Cathedral. Taken on April 4th

Indian Houses. Suburb of Tondo, Manila

Binondo Church

c. 1844–46

Daguerreotypes

On loan from The Hispanic Society of America, New York

Daguerreotypes, the first photographic technology, arrived in the Philippines via British India in 1841, just two years after their introduction in France. Photographic studios soon spread throughout the archipelago, earlier than anywhere else in Asia. As a customs inspector, Jules Itier photographed places shaped by Spanish colonial rule, commerce, religion, and migration. These four views depict urban and provincial landscapes in and around Manila: a Catholic church in Binondo, the world's oldest Chinatown; houses in Tondo, where Indian communities formed part of the diverse migrant population drawn to Manila by commerce and colonial trade; the Manila Cathedral, a seat of the Spanish Archdiocese; and the road toward Pagsanjan, a town connected to Manila by river and trade. While they appear to offer straightforward views of places, each photograph is a selective account shaped by Itier's subject, viewpoint, and profession. Together, they document landscapes and sites while revealing how photographers construct, rather than simply record, the places and people depicted.

—Ernest Rafael Hartwell, professor of Spanish and affiliated faculty of Latin American Studies, Western Washington University

Charles W. Andrews

British, 1830–1869

Album of the Philippines

1857

Bound album of twenty-one color lithographs

On loan from The Hispanic Society of America, New York

Little is known about British illustrator Charles W. Andrews beyond his work for *Ilustración filipina*, a short-lived magazine published in Manila in 1859–60. This 1857 album depicts Filipino "types" and everyday life: wealthy Filipinos carried in hammocks, women sharing *tubâ* (palm wine) at a nipa-hut canteen, local fishing techniques, *bangkas* (dugout canoes) on tranquil rivers, and upper-class parties featuring dances imported from Spain, including the waltz and a local dance, the *jota manileña*. Andrews's approach was shaped by *tipos del país*, a popular nineteenth-century tradition of depicting Filipinos as recognizable "types," often distinguished by occupation, dress, gender, and class. While these images offered glimpses of everyday life, they also shaped how Filipinos were seen—and categorized—under colonial rule. In many lithographs, the Filipino subjects stare back at the viewer or artist, inviting us to ask ourselves: Who, in the end, is observing whom?

—Ernest Rafael Hartwell, professor of Spanish and affiliated faculty of Latin American Studies, Western Washington University

Click the link here to view the full album.

Francisco van Camp

Dutch, born 1840

Albert Honiss

British, active in Manila, Philippines, c. 1865–74

Album Tipos Filipinos

c. 1870s

Bound folio of fifty-one albumen prints

On loan from The Hispanic Society of America, New York

The first known photographic studio in the Philippines was established by British photographer Albert Honiss in 1865. When Honiss died in 1874, Dutch photographer Francisco van Camp took over. Both are credited on the album displayed here. The portraits depict Filipinos in indoor studio settings. Figures embrace, play the harp, or hold trays of vegetables, decontextualized from local or domestic surroundings. Staged like the highly popular *cartes de visite* of the era (small photographic portraits mounted on cards for collecting and social exchange), these images take an explicitly ethnographic approach, featuring Indigenous Filipinos with specific clothing, gestures, and props: Bontoc men with tall shields, *pis syabit* headscarves worn by the Tausug, *kalapiaw* or fan-palm rain capes, and Aetas, known then as *negritos*, with long bows taller than themselves. What might these photographed individuals be thinking? How much agency did they have in choosing their costumes and poses so as to represent themselves and their cultures?

—Ernest Rafael Hartwell, professor of Spanish and affiliated faculty of Latin American Studies, Western Washington University

Click the link here to view the full album.

Francisco van Camp

Dutch, born 1840

Album MP, Volume I

c. 1870s

Bound folio of sixty-nine albumen prints

Album MP, Volume II

c. 1870s

Bound folio of fifty-four albumen prints

On loan from The Hispanic Society of America, New York

Francisco van Camp's albums of photographs bring together Philippine cityscapes, studio portraits, and images of people, occupations, customs, and everyday life. His views of Manila depict a desolate, monumental city, where tiny people are included mostly for scale. One picture uses depth of field to contrast a chaotic agglomeration of moored *bangkas* (dugout canoes) and deserted streets alongside the waterway. Many ghostly figures appear as well, such as women waiting and oxen milling about. Were these deliberately erased, or is their blurriness a casualty of early photography's long exposure times? How does this lack of local *manileños* impact the stories van Camp visually tells about the Manila streets?

—Ernest Rafael Hartwell, professor of Spanish and affiliated faculty of Latin American Studies, Western Washington University

Click the link here to view volume I.

Click the link here to view volume II.

Pierre Toussaint Frédéric Mialhe

French, 1810–1881

Picturesque Album of the Isle of Cuba

c. 1850s

Bound folio of twenty-five color lithographs and two folding maps

On loan from The Hispanic Society of America, New York

Drafted by the French painter and lithographer Frédéric Mialhe, this album presented Cuba's landscapes, architecture, and customs to audiences around the world. Mialhe traveled extensively across the island in the 1840s, depicting its rapid modernization. Steamships, railroads, plantations, and monumental neoclassical buildings figure prominently. The lithographs were very successful, circulating widely in Europe and the United States, where they were reproduced in a variety of formats, including decorative ceramics and albums like this one. This chromolithographic edition was produced in Germany using a new color printing process that enhanced the original images. The Hispanic Society's German edition, shown here, exemplifies the far-reaching networks through which lithographs circulated in the nineteenth century. Its journey from Cuba to Germany and back into a collection in the United States reflects the exhibition's broader themes of circulation, reproduction, and the ways printed images shaped perceptions of the island.

—Asiel Sepúlveda, assistant professor, Art History and Visual Culture, Babson College

Click the link here to view the full album.

Gil Gelpí y Ferro

Spanish, 1826–1894

Historic Photographic Album of the Cuban War

c. 1872

Bound album with twenty-four albumen photographs and one printed plate

On loan from The Hispanic Society of America, New York

Published midway through the Ten Years' War (1868–78), Cuba's first major struggle for independence from Spain, this heavily loyalist volume served as an instrument of imperial propaganda. Compiled by pro-Spanish journalist Gil Gelpí y Ferro, it uses documentary photography to shape public opinion and defend Spain's authority over its "Ever Faithful Isle." The photographs purposefully document the Spanish military, naval forces, and elite volunteer corps. Rather than capturing human suffering and the devastation of conflict, they depict highly disciplined soldiers, strategic military infrastructure, and orderly camps to project a narrative of an inevitable Spanish victory. Looking past this curated facade, however, we can glimpse a desperate empire attempting to control a landscape that was rapidly slipping from its grasp, threatened by rival factions, rebel forces, and social heterogeneity. Many Cuban lives are missing from these pages.

—Paul Niell, associate professor of art history, College of Fine Arts, Florida State University

Click the link here to view the full album.

Eduardo López Cepero

Puerto Rican, 1841–1903

Views of the Capital: A Photographic Album of Civil and Military Buildings and Key Landmarks in San Juan, Puerto Rico

c. 1880

Bound album of fifty albumen photographs

On loan from The Hispanic Society of America, New York

Eduardo López Cepero captures here the center of power in one of Spain's last colonial outposts in the Americas. These images serve as an archive of the ways in which Spain imagined and organized the colonial city of San Juan as a military and administrative center. While focused on architecture, the photographs also document the ways that power was spatially organized in the city, from administrative buildings that gave life to the colonial state, to more commonplace sites like bridges and the local cemetery. While individuals do stare into the camera, they are not central to López Cepero's project—they are mere ghosts that haunt the photographs. They remind us of how colonial power sought to erase Puerto Ricans, yet they remained and still remain.

—Jorell Meléndez-Badillo, associate professor of Latin American and Caribbean history, University of Wisconsin–Madison

Click the link here to view the full album.

Charles DeForest Fredricks

American, 1823–1894

Augusto Daries

French, active in Cuba, 1860s–80s

Fruit Stand, Havana

Panorama of Havana

c. 1856–58

Albumen prints laid on board

On loan from The Hispanic Society of America, New York

Charles DeForest Fredricks

American, 1823–1894

Augusto Daries

French, active in Cuba, 1860s–80s

Teniente Rey Street and the Customs House, Havana

Sugar Mill Barracks, Cuba

Plaza de Armas, Havana

Tacón Grand Theater and Inglaterra Grand Hotel and Restaurant, Havana

c. 1856–58

Albumen prints laid on board

On loan from The Hispanic Society of America, New York

As Spain tenuously maintained its hold on the final pieces of its global empire, Spaniards and Creole (island-born) elites in Cuba fostered an image of the island as a disciplined colonial territory and model of nineteenth-century progress. This album of albumen photographs exemplifies this tendency. Created as a part of a commercial partnership between photographer Charles DeForest Fredricks and his associate Augusto Daries, these early prints offer a highly constructed portrait of Cuban society. They memorialize Cuba's grand neoclassical architecture, bustling plazas, and sugar plantations, but their deliberate framing largely excludes the lower social echelons and enslaved people whose labor drove this modernizing moment.

—Paul Niell, associate professor of art history, College of Fine Arts, Florida State University

Attilio Moscioni Chesi

Italian, 1876–1950

Tobacco Plantation, Caguas-Cayey Cigar Company, Puerto Rico

Sugarcane Train, Toa Baja, Puerto Rico

Drying Tobacco

c. 1898–1910

Photographer unidentified

Active Puerto Rico, c. twentieth century

Modern Sugar Mill

c. 1910

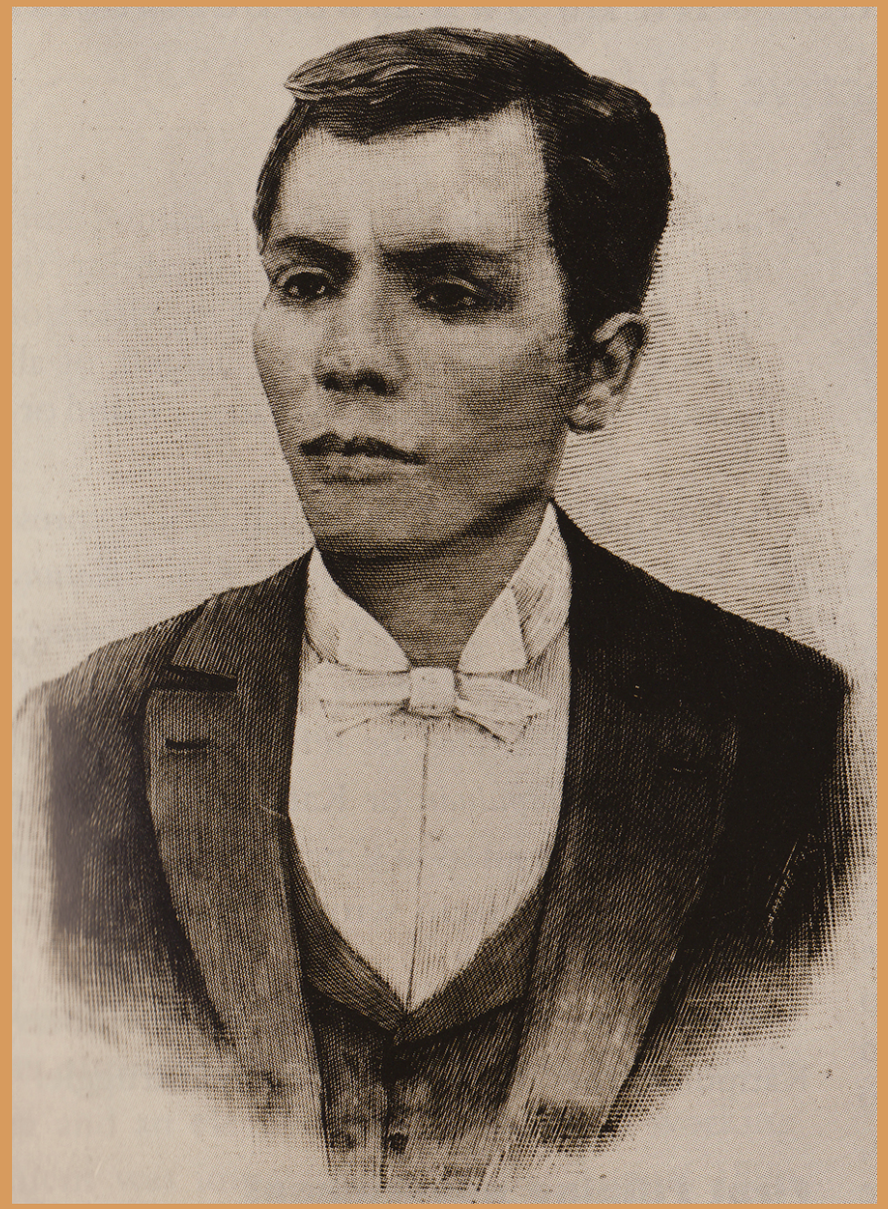
Gelatin silver prints laid down on board

On loan from The Hispanic Society of America, New York

In 1897, historian Cayetano Coll y Toste completed a census of Puerto Rico, noting that there were 893,907 people living there, of whom 383 were Italians. The following year, when the United States invaded, the Italian photographer Attilio Moscioni moved to Puerto Rico and made it his home until 1917, the year Puerto Ricans were granted US citizenship through the Jones-Shafroth Act. Moscioni captured the complex world of agriculture, from the hands that worked in the tobacco processing factories to the fields that produced its crops and the railway locomotives that moved sugar from one place to another. The photographs evidence the enormous wealth that Puerto Rico produced, overwhelmingly concentrated in the hands of absentee landlords and factory owners. Modern sugar mills, like the one captured in *Un moderno ingenio azucarero*, offer a glimpse of the scale of sugar production at the turn of the twentieth century.

—Jorell Meléndez-Badillo, associate professor of Latin American and Caribbean history, University of Wisconsin–Madison

Born in Manila in 1863, Andrés Bonifacio was a Filipino nationalist and revolutionary leader who fought for independence from Spanish colonial rule. In 1892 he joined the Liga Filipina, a reform organization founded by writer and nationalist José Rizal to advocate for Filipino rights. Rizal was arrested soon after, and Bonifacio became increasingly convinced that reform would not bring independence. That same year, he founded the Katipunan, a secret society dedicated to national liberation that brought together members of the working and middle classes. By 1896, it had grown to more than thirty thousand members. That year, following Rizal's execution by the Spanish colonial government, Bonifacio helped launch the Philippine Revolution. But his leadership was challenged soon after, and he was arrested, tried for treason, and executed in 1897. Written the year before his death, his poem "Pagibig sa Tinubuang Bayan" presents love of country as a call to collective sacrifice.



José Martí was a Cuban writer, journalist, and revolutionary who became a leading voice in the struggle for independence from Spanish colonial rule. Born in Havana in 1853 to Spanish emigres, he became politically active as a teenager and was imprisoned and sentenced to hard labor at sixteen for his writings in support of Cuban independence. Forced to leave Cuba for Spain, he continued his education as well as his political and literary work, spending much of his later life in exile, including in New York. In 1892 he founded the Cuban Revolutionary Party, which sought to unite Cubans in the struggle for independence. He returned to the island in 1895 to join the Cuban War of Independence and was killed in battle that May. Martí's poetry gave voice to the emotional and political dimensions of Cuban nationalism. In "Dos patrias," he evokes Cuba as a wounded, grieving homeland, expressing the personal cost of exile and the urgency of liberation.



Born in San Germán in 1843, Lola Rodríguez de Tió was a Puerto Rican poet, political activist, and advocate for women's rights. In 1868, inspired by the Grito de Lares (Cry of Lares), an uprising against Spanish colonial rule named for the Puerto Rican town where it took place, she wrote patriotic lyrics to the tune of "La Borinqueña" ("The Puerto Rican Woman," from Borinquén, an Indigenous name for the island). The song and her writings became popular but brought her into conflict with Spanish authorities. Repeatedly exiled for her political activities, Rodríguez de Tió eventually settled in Havana, where her home became a gathering place for Cuban revolutionaries, intellectuals, and Puerto Rican exiles. She later supported José Martí and other Cuban independence leaders and helped found the Cuban Academy of Arts and Letters in 1910. In the stanzas quoted here from "La Borinqueña," Rodríguez de Tió calls on Puerto Ricans to awaken and join the struggle for freedom. Her lyrics transformed a popular song into a powerful expression of Puerto Rican nationalism, capturing the independence movement's aspirations for political self-determination.

