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Latin America and the Swedish diaspora: the case of Cuba and Argentina

Dr. Oleski Miranda Navarro
Augustana College, Rock Island Illinois

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I spent a week at the Swenson Swedish Immigration Center to explore materials that would highlight the history and cultural influence of Swedish and Scandinavian immigration in Latin America. Before beginning my research, I pinpointed a few texts and publications at the Center that I thought would help to develop further connections between race and immigration for Latin America. My intention was to include the subject in the delivery of my Latin American Studies courses at Augustana College and eventually pen a journal article on the research findings. Once I began working at the Swenson Center, I was happy to find a wealth of unexpected materials to enhance my investigation.

Among the materials reviewed, were the accounts of Fredrika Bremer’s travels in Cuba and the United States, which are translated into English and titled *The Homes of the New World: Impressions of America* (1853). Specific accounts of her time in Cuba were translated into Spanish and called *Cartas desde Cuba* (Letters from Cuba). These chronicles of her experiences provide a unique perspective of life in Cuba through the eyes of a Swedish woman who described culture and daily life there in the mid nineteenth century. Of particular importance is the discussion she provides regarding slavery and her comparison of slavery between Cuba and the United States. Her writings demonstrate an advanced moral perspective regarding the treatment of slaves at that point in time. Her writings also reflected a feminist perspective of human beings but especially of female slaves.

Additional historical findings at the Swenson Center that provided perspective for the course were Jean Adam Graaner’s account of the signing of Argentina’s declaration of independence in 1816, *Las provincias del Río de la Plata en 1816: informe dirigido al príncipe Bernadotte*. Graaner was the only foreigner present during the signing, which reveals an early historical tie between Sweden and Latin America.

With regard to Swedish immigration to Latin America, the investigation conducted at the Swenson Center led me to archived volumes of the periodical *Augustana*, which published ads promoting Swedish colonization of Cuba and created a direct connection between Augustana
College and Scandinavian migration to the Caribbean. I also came across letters sent to the president of the synod at Augustana in Rock Island, Eric Norelius, by Lutheran priest Aaron Lindholm, who hoped to build a church in Bayate, the Swedish community in Cuba. At its largest, Bayate was home to 280 Swedish settlers. The letters provide insight regarding this community, the obstacles members faced, accounts of the weather, as well as Lindholm’s personal and professional struggles as a clergyman working in a community that, according to him, was not devout.

Advertisements for colonizing communities in Cuba appearing regularly in the periodical *Augustana* January – July 1906.

This investigation yielded important materials pertinent to ongoing discussions of migratory ties between Hispanic America and the Scandinavian world and will provide Augustana students and members of the academic community in general with insight regarding Scandinavian historical and cultural heritage in Cuba and Argentina, broadening what have often been narrow discussions of the Swedish diaspora experience in Latin America. I appreciate the availability of materials, expertise and invaluable help provided by Swenson Center staff members Lisa Huntsha, Jill Seaholm and Susanne Titus. Thank you!