The National Libraries of France and Cuba: A Comparison

**Fourteenth century origins**

- The origins of the national library of France date back to 1368 when Charles V moved his private library to the Louvre Museum.
- A royal order in 1537 required all printers and booksellers to deposit a copy of any printed book into the national library.
- In 1719 Jean-Paul Bignon was named the king’s librarian and is credited with providing wider access to the collections for the average person.
- After many moves, names, and incarnations, the Bibliothèque nationale de France was officially created on January 4, 1994.
- The reading rooms pictured below were opened to the public three years later.

**HISTORY**

- The French Revolution in 1789 and the Cuban Revolution in 1959 led to a dramatic increase in each of their collections due to the seizure of private libraries.

**Both employ the law of legal deposit to ensure the growth of their collections. In Cuba this law requires that every publisher in the country deposit 5 copies with the national library for them to distribute. In France, there is no quantity specified but the law today extends to multimedia content as well as web pages.**

**Both are overseen by their respective Ministry of Culture.**

**Both national libraries are valued by their countries as evidenced by continued growth, expansion, and efforts to digitally preserve their collections.**

**The BnF Serves as a reference library for the public**

**The BNJM serves as the central library for all public branches therefore controlling everything in those branches.**

**Twentieth century origins**

- Founded in 1901 by military order during the US occupation following the Spanish-American War.
- The national library was established after Cuba gained independence from Spain in order to begin a repository of culture.
- The national library had no ties to Cuba’s few public libraries from 1901-1958.
- Only 30 public libraries before the revolution and Fidel Castro’s rise to power in 1959.
- At that same time, the illiteracy rate was at 25%.
- Today it serves as the country’s central library and links nearly 400 Cuban public libraries with the literacy rate reported at 99.8%.