



The *Guayabera* and Cultural Research

by Paddy Bowman

We take our clothing for granted. Pull on a T-shirt, zip up your jeans, slip into some flip-flops, and head out the door. But clothing has a history and often serves as a cultural marker. When folklorist Michael Knoll moved to Miami, Florida, he noticed that many men there wore distinctive shirts called *guayaberas*, a garment commonly worn throughout much of Latin America and the Caribbean. As a newcomer to South Florida and a folklorist, he decided to learn about the *guayabera* as a way to understand his new community.

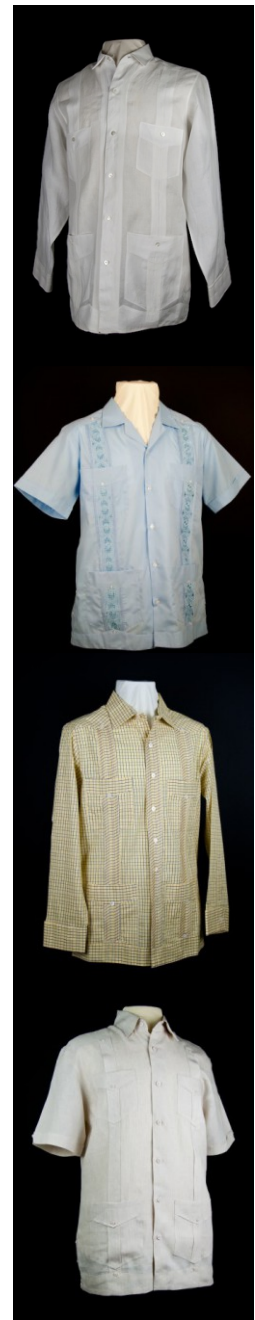
After finding few academic publications on this topic, Michael used the tools of the folklorist's trade to learn more. He checked the Yellow Pages, did online research, and drove around neighborhoods to find businesses that made and sold *guayaberas*. He began speaking to people to learn their ways of thinking about the shirt. Michael came across stories that placed the creation of the *guayabera* in Cuba, Mexico, and other countries. He also learned how important the shirt is to Cuban Americans in Miami and men of many ethnicities who wear *guayaberas* to weddings, religious events, family cookouts, and work.

During this initial research, Michael found little trustworthy historical information, so he decided to create a research project. He said, "I thought that combining historical research with a folklorist's approach could bring the story of this iconic shirt into the present." He traveled to Cuba and Mexico to investigate the story in archives and conduct interviews in factories, tailoring shops, and elsewhere. Michael compiled his research by curating *The Guayabera: A Shirt's Story*, an exhibition at HistoryMiami.

So, where did the *guayabera* originate? Learn more about Michael's discoveries and the *guayabera* in the bilingual website www.historymiami.org/guayabera, developed as an online version of the exhibition. "History is constructed," said Michael. "We invite others to build on our starting point."

Classroom Connection

The tuxedo, jeans, mini-skirts, dashikis—what item of clothing fascinates you? Choose one to investigate and deepen your historical research with interviews to include people's experiences and viewpoints. Use our Release Form and create a web page, slideshow, podcast, or report to share what you learn.



Photographs courtesy of HistoryMiami