



# Smithsonian

*National Museum of Natural History*

## Guide to the Hector Acebes papers and photographs

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	National Anthropological Archives
<b>Title:</b>	Hector Acebes papers and photographs
<b>Date:</b>	circa 1948-1950s
<b>Identifier:</b>	NAA.2023-01
<b>Creator:</b>	Acebes, Hector
<b>Extent:</b>	19.3 Linear feet
<b>Language:</b>	English , Spanish; Castilian .

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

The Hector Acebes papers and photographs came to the archives in four accessions. The first accession came in 1951 and was donated by Acebes himself, as were the two that followed in 1994 and 2016. The final accession, comprising the bulk of the collection, came to the archives in 2022 and was donated by Acebes' heirs.

### Other Finding Aids

A detailed listing of the film, video, and sound elements is available in the repository.

### Processing Information

The Hector Acebes papers and photographs came to the archives in four accessions: MS 4389, 1994-28, 2016-39, and 2023-01. The archivist merged all four accessions into this collection in 2023.

The collection came to the archives generally grouped by format (e.g. papers) and subject (i.e. Africa). The archivist maintained this organization.

News clippings that did not relate to Acebes were discarded, as were some duplicate material.

### Restrictions

The Hector Acebes papers and photographs are open for research. Access to the collection requires an appointment.

### Conditions Governing Use

Contact the repository for terms of use.

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## Biographical / Historical

Hector Acebes (1921-2017) was an American photographer and filmmaker known for his photography from expeditions in Africa and South America in the late 1940s and 1950s.

Acebes was born in New York City but grew up in Bogota, Colombia and Madrid, Spain. He later attended the New York Military Academy, and served in World War II on the European front. Following this, he studied engineering at MIT, graduating in 1947.

Acebes then began his career as photographer and filmmaker, making multiple expeditions in Africa and South America. His first African expedition was to Morocco and Algeria, but he later traveled throughout the continent. His last Africa trip was the most extensive, where he drove from Dakar to Zanzibar.

Among his expeditions in South America were journeys up the Orinoco River and excursions to visit various Indigenous communities including Guaica, Jivaro, Arhuaco, and Yuco peoples.

Acebes lectured about his travels and held exhibits of his photographs, which reveal a tendency toward portraiture of individuals. He also wrote several books, including *Orinoco Adventure*, about his attempt to find the headwaters of the Orinoco River.

Acebes later became an industrial filmmaker for engineering projects throughout South America. He died in Bogota.

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## Scope and Contents

The Hector Acebes papers and photographs primarily contain Acebes' photographs from his expeditions in Africa and South America but also include journals, maps, press clippings, writings and publications by Acebes, and films.

The core of the collection are Acebes original negatives and contact prints, however there are several sets of enlargements of select photographs as well. Most contact sheets have some annotation on verso indicating the country, town, region, and/or community represented.

The papers include several journals Acebes kept during his South America expeditions (unfortunately his Africa journals were lost). Maps of Africa are annotated with Acebes' routes and places visited, and extensive press clippings cover and review Acebes travels, publications, and lectures.

The films comprise a seemingly random selection of motion picture films, sound elements and videos related to the production of industrial films on a variety of South American development projects by Hector Acebes for his own company Acebes Productions. According to the credits appearing on the films, the company was a partnership with the filmmaker's brother Juan Acebes. Most of the films are undated but dates appearing on the video transfers and dates ascertained from the film stocks indicate that the films were most likely produced in the 1970s-1990s. There are also videos of an interview with Acebes conducted by Ed Marquand, in circa 2003.

Please note that the contents of the collection and the language and terminology used reflect the context and culture of the time of its creation. As an historical document, its contents may be at odds with contemporary views and terminology and considered offensive today. The information within this collection does not reflect the views of the Smithsonian Institution or National Anthropological Archives, but is available in its original form to facilitate research.

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## Arrangement

The collection is arranged into three series: 1. Papers; 2. Photographs; 3. Film and video.

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## Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Places:

Algeria  
Benin  
Cameroon  
Chad  
Colombia  
Congo (Democratic Republic)  
Ecuador  
Guinea  
Kenya  
Mali  
Morocco  
Venezuela

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: Papers, 1951-2004

Box 1, Folder 1	Accession documentation, 1951, 1994
Box 1, Folder 2	Passports and personal items, undated
Box 1, Folder 3	Maps, undated Notes: Maps are annotated by Acebes.
Box 1, Folder 4	Promotional material, 1992
Box 1, Folder 5	Notes and writings, 1951, undated
Box 1, Folder 6	Journal - Ecuador, 1950
Box 1, Folder 7	Journal - Vaupes, 1950
Box 1, Folder 8	Journal - Orinoco, 1951
Box 1, Folder 9	News clippings and press about Orinoco Adventure, 1954
Box 1, Folder 10	Flyers relating to Acebes' films, undated
Box 1, Folder 11	List of Acebes' film productions, undated
Box 1, Folder 12	Miscellaneous materials, 1952
Box 1	Script by Acebes titled "Diamonds are not Green", undated 1 Volume
Box 2	Two copies of Orinoco Adventure (one copy is titled "Jungle Explorer" but is the same book), 1954 2 Volumes
Box 2	Copy of Hector Acebes: Portraits in Africa, 2004 1 Volume
Box 2, Folder 4	Promotional material for Portraits in Africa, 2004
Box 3	News clippings and press about Acebes and his work, undated

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## Series 2: Photographs, 1948-1950s

## Africa photographs

Box 2, Folder 1	Selected Africa photographic prints, ca 1950s
Box 4	Africa contact sheets, first trip, 1948 Notes: Photographs from Acebes first trip to North Africa. Primarily portraits of people from Marrakesh, Meknez, Tiznit, Taroudant, and Casablanca in Morocco and Colomb Bechar in Algeria. Some photographs are probably from red-light districts and show women in varying states of dress.
Box 5	Africa contact sheets, second trip, 1949 Notes: photographs primarily of people but also the built environment. Locations are annotated on verso of sheets and include the Mali villages of Sangha, Kidal, Douentza, Timbuktu, Gao, Goundam, Mopti, Djenne, and Koriensa as well as locales in Chad, Burkina Faso, and Cameroon.
Box 6	Africa contact sheets, third trip (1 of 2), circa 1950s Notes: Photographs primarily of people but also the built environment. Some locations are annotated on verso of sheets and include Youkounkoun and Labe in Guinea; Caroua and Maroua in Cameroon; Bamako in Mali; Kisangani and Gangala na bodio in Congo, Kisenyi in Uganda, Kiuu in Kenya, and unspecified locations in Ruanda Urundi (now Rwanda and Burundi) and Dahomey (Now southern Benin). Communities visited include those of Fulani, Watitsi, Kikuyu, and Mangbetu peoples.
Box 7	Africa contact sheets, third trip (2 of 2), circa 1950s Notes: Photographs primarily of people but also the built environment. Some locations are annotated on verso of sheets and include Youkounkoun and Labe in Guinea; Caroua and Maroua in Cameroon; Bamako in Mali; Kisangani and Gangala na bodio in Congo, Kisenyi in Uganda, Kiuu in Kenya, and unspecified locations in Ruanda Urundi (now Rwanda and Burundi) and Dahomey (Now southern Benin). Communities visited include those of Fulani, Watitsi, Kikuyu, and Mangbetu peoples.
Box 8	Africa contact sheets for lost negatives, circa 1950s Notes: Photographs primarily of people but also the built environment. Some locations are annotated on verso of sheets and include the Mali towns of Sarafere, Timbuktu, Mopti, Gao, Djenne, Sangha, and Koriensa; Fort Lamy, Djemene, and Sarh in Chad, Fianga and Maroua in Cameroon, and Tinzit and Marrakesh in Morocco.
Box 9	Africa negatives for first and second trip, 1948-1949 Notes: Contact sheets and negatives follow the same order.

Box 10 Africa negatives for third trip, circa 1950s  
Notes: Contact sheets and negatives follow the same order.

Box 11 Africa color slides, circa 1950s  
Notes: Slides are annotated with locations, including towns in Mali, Chad, Algeria, and Morocco.

Box 12 Oversize Africa photographic prints, circa 1950s  
Notes: Enlargements of select photographs.

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## South America photographs

Box 2, Folder 2 Selected South America photographic prints, circa 1950s  
Notes: Enlargements of select photographs, including two hand-drawn maps of areas marked with locations of Indigenous communities.

Box 2, Folder 3 Photographic prints relating to Orinoco trip, with typed descriptions, circa 1950s  
Notes: List of descriptions in file. This set of photographs formerly comprised MS 4389.

Box 13 South America contact sheets (1 of 2), circa 1950s  
Notes: Annotations on verso indicate locations and Indigenous communities visited including Yuco/Yukpa and Choco/Embera peoples in Colombia and Jivaro people in Ecuador.

Box 14 South America contact sheets (2 of 2), circa 1950s  
Notes: Annotations on verso indicate locations and Indigenous communities visited including Choco/Embera peoples in Colombia and Cayapas/Chachi in Ecuador, as well as locations in the Llanos of Columbia and Venezuela and the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta mountains.

Box 15 South America negatives, circa 1950s  
Notes: Contact sheets and negatives follow the same order.

Box 11 South America slides  
Notes: Includes photographs of Vaupes, Colombia, Orinoco River in Venezuela, and Jivaro community in Ecuador.

Box 16 Oversize South America photographic prints, circa 1950s  
Notes: Enlargements of selected photographs.

Box 17 Oversize South America photographic prints, circa 1950s  
Notes: Enlargements of selected photographs.

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## Series 3: Film and video, circa 1970s-1990s

**Scope and Contents:** The films comprise a seemingly random selection of motion picture films, sound elements and videos related to the production of industrial films on a variety of South American development projects by Hector Acebes for his own company Acebes Productions. According to the credits appearing on the films, the company was a partnership with the filmmaker's brother Juan Acebes. Most of the films are undated but dates appearing on the video transfers and dates ascertained from the film stocks indicate that the films were most likely produced in the 1970s-1990s. There are also videos of an interview with Acebes conducted by Ed Marquand, in circa 2003. Detailed inventory of video, film, and sound elements available in the repository.

**General:** Film, video, and sound materials are located with HSFA collections.

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