Shiksa Speaks

A WHITE, NON-JEW'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE CUBAN JEWISH DIASPORA AND ITS LEGACY

Laura Finley

Shiksa Speaks: A White, Non-Jew's Understanding of the Cuban Jewish Diaspora and Its Legacy

PEACE EDUCATION

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LAURA FINLEY

Barry University, Miami Shores, Florida

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FOREWORD

Heidi Heft LaPorte

In her compelling work, Dr. Laura Finley, a distinguished Professor of Sociology & Criminology at Barry University, encourages readers to explore the intriguing depths of the history of Cuban immigration to the United States. With candidness, she offers hner unique perspective as a 'shiksa,' a non-Jewish woman who, as both a family member and an outsider, brings forth a distinctive lens through which to view the journey of Jewish immigrants. This journey takes them from the tumultuous landscapes of Eastern Europe to the vibrant heart of Cuba and, ultimately, the United States. Dr. Finley's exploration explores the emotional terrain of the human experience, where resilience intertwines with cultural identity. Through her work, she vividly portrays immigrants' struggles, triumphs, contradictions, and the unspoken dreams that permeated their lives.

As we navigate these pages, Dr. Finley confronts us with the complexities of refuge, identity, and immigration, all while maintaining the mindful perspective of an observer who is profoundly empathetic yet inherently distinct from the cultural narrative she describes. She highlights the pivotal role of the Cuban Revolution and how the 'Jewban' identity symbolizes a unique cultural amalgamation, epitomizing adaptation, resilience, and the longing for belonging. The narrative reaches into the heart of the Cuban Jewish community, exploring the nuanced dy-

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namics of their identities, professional achievements, and the distinctive 'Cuban privilege' that has shaped their exile experience.

While Dr. Finley's narrative is a rich and empathetic exploration of the 'Jewban' experience, it is essential to recognize the broader academic discourse surrounding topics of identity and immigration. Dr. Finley's work situates itself within these complex conversations, offering a deep dive into the Jewish-Cuban narrative and acknowledging the myriad ways it intersects with and diverges from other immigrant experiences.

Dr. Finley addresses the delicate subject of privilege and the Cuban community's intricate relationship with other groups in this narrative. With tact and sensitivity, she, as an outsider, sheds light on the contrasts and tensions that arise when disparate experiences of marginalization and resilience intersect. This book does not shy away from these tough conversations; instead, it approaches them thoughtfully, encouraging readers to reflect on the broader implications of social justice and our collective responsibility towards inclusivity.

By framing the 'Jewban' experience within the broader context of global immigration and cultural integration from her unique vantage point, Dr. Finley's work contributes to a crucial and ongoing conversation. It is a testament to her commitment to narrating history and engaging critically with it, prompting readers to reflect not only on the resilience and triumphs of the Cuban Jewish community but also on our collective understanding of identity, belonging, and the dynamic landscapes of cultural heritage.

Dr. Finley's exploration is not just an invitation to reflect—it's a call to action. It urges us to approach these stories with empathy, understanding, and a commitment to thoughtfully engage with the intricate mosaic of our shared human experience. This book challenges us to use our voices and privilege to foster equity and inclusivity, promoting a synergy of compassion and innovation.

As we embark on this journey with Dr. Finley, we are reminded that the stories we tell and the histories we narrate are not just recollections of the past but active participants in shaping our future. As we turn each page, we honor not just the collective narrative but also the individual stories that form the mosaic of our history.

With hope for a world of deeper understanding and shared stories,

—Dr. Heidi Heft LaPorte
Associate Professor,
Barry University School of Social Work

INTRODUCTION

I am Shiksa. In Yiddish that is a term—sometimes a disparaging one—for a gentile or non-religious women. Until a few years ago, at the time 45 years old, I had no idea what that meant. I am White, of nearly 100 percent British, Scottish and Irish origin, and was raised in rural Michigan. I grew up knowing absolutely no Jewish people. If they lived in my broader community, I was unaware of them. I am also *Blanca no Judia*, Spanish for White-non-Jew. In fact, I am not religious at all. Yet here I am, writing a book about Cuban Jews. How did that happen, one might wonder? As sad as it is to admit, growing up I had no idea that there were Jewish people in the Caribbean and Latin America, and that some of them emigrated to the U.S. I knew next to nothing about Latin American history, and specifically, Cuban history, which has become such an important part of my life. In my rural Michigan school, we were taught about the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis, and that Castro was the communist devil. That is all. I am not proud of that lack of knowledge, but rural Michigan educators simply did not prioritize teaching about Latin America at all, at least not when I was in school.

Then I moved to South Florida in 2005. South Florida is a treasure trove of diversity, and here I have met, worked with, and befriended people from all over and from many religious groups. But even more, I met Cuban Jews, Jewbans, as they are called. Although far from fluent, I have brushed up on my Spanish (last

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studied formally in high school in 1989). In 2018. I even started dating a Jewban, and learned about and became some part of his large and close extended family as we subsequently married in 2020. The family is wonderful—welcoming, loving, and all quite successful. My in-laws were both born in Cuba to families that emigrated from Eastern Europe. All left due to intolerance and lack of economic opportunity in the 1920s and had intended to make a new life in the US. When the US significantly changed immigration laws in 1924, however, many Jews in their situation ended up staying in Cuba. They described a lovely, vibrant island with Jewish family and friends living and working near to one another. Until the revolution in 1959 that resulted in Fulgencio Batista fleeing the island and Fidel Castro taking power. My in-laws married and left for the US, never to return. In the next few years, all of their family also emigrated to the US and established themselves anew, once more.

When my husband's father passed away in 2021, in part due to blood cancer and in part due to COVID-19, I sat with the family as they mourned. Everyone shared stories, and I learned even more about the Jewbans and their double diaspora from Eastern Europe to Cuba then to the US. At one point my husband said, "Someone should write a book about our family." I have written a lot of scholarly, reference work but never this kind of thing, however, I declared, "I write sometimes, maybe I could?" Hence was cooked up a proposal, thankfully which was granted by my employer, Barry University, for sabbatical in Spring 2023 to conduct in-depth interviews with his extended family and others they may connect me to so as to better understand the Cuban Jewish double diaspora and how it has affected later generations. This work, whatever it may be, is a tribute to Jack Bekerman, who I was lucky to know for a brief time.

I have learned a great deal and am grateful for the opportunity provided by the family and other connections as well as by my university. I am also grateful to have been able to visit Cuba for three days in July 2023. My husband and daughter joined me, and not only did we see most of the important landmarks in Havana, but we were also able to tour Jewish Havana. We visited the Patronato, where my in-laws were married, visited the oldest Jewish cemetery, and walked around the Jewish area of old town. It was eye opening, and I have included in this book some observations and experiences from the trip.

Despite all that I have learned, I remain interested in learning more. The Jewbans are amongst the most welcoming and interesting people I have met (I think that is accurate, even if I am biased from being part of the family). They also have some fascinating family narratives that I think can add to the scholarly research on immigration, diaspora, and resilience. I am proud to share what I can. Throughout the book I have woven in memories, ideas, and quotes from those I interviewed, information acquired through reviewing documents the family retained, as well as additional research I conducted from scholarly texts. I make no claim that my review of the research is exhaustive, although I did my best to acquire as much background knowledge as I could. Importantly, as a participant researcher, I rec-

ognize that the memories shared with me may have been influenced by my relationship with the interviewees. That is a limitation of participatory research, but I believe the benefits in this case were tremendous, as it can help understand the role that family narratives shape in diasporic communities. Further, as LaPorte et al. (2009) noted, "In general, commentators caution that personal testimonies about life in Cuba, on which much of the literature is based, are very emotionally charged and may be subject to subtle manipulation—deliberate or not—to promote a particular worldview" (p. 315).

My interview research included interviews with a total of 22 individuals—all but one is somehow related to the family. One is an old friend from Cuba who lives in South Florida and has remained close. Each interview was a minimum of 30 minutes in length, with several lasting multiple hours. All interviewees gave their permission to use their names and to quote them as needed. A profile of the interviewees is provided below.

NOTE: I have found various spellings for some of the family members from Eastern Europe. Throughout the book I used consistently the spelling I saw most frequently.

EXILE GENERATION

Lilia is almost 80 and left Cuba immediately after marrying Jack, who passed away in 2021. She was 16 when she left the island, and he was 23. She is my mother-in-law.

Ester is Lilia's cousin on her mother, Consuelo's, side. She is a professor emeritus who is the only family member to have extensively studied the Jewban experience and has been to Cuba several times. She was 6 when she left the island.

Rachel S. is Ester's sister, also Lilia's cousin on her mother's side. She is a social worker and, being not yet 4 when the family left the island, has more impression of it than distinct memories.

Enrique/Henry is Jack's brother. He is ten years younger so is in his mid-1970s. He and his family left Cuba after the Bay of Pigs invasion. He was a teenager and has quite distinct memories of living in Havana and the passage to the US.

Anita was married to Lilia's brother, Leo. She was actually born in the US because her parents decided she would have a better life if she had American citizenship from the outset. They moved to Cuba when she was a baby, then to the US as part of the exile generation. Gregg and Jeff are her children with Leo (as is Eric, but he was not involved in the research).

Marcos is different than the other exiles in that he was sent by his family to Los Angeles as part of Operation Pedro Pan, an initiative that sent some 14,000 unaccompanied children ages 6–18 to the US between 1960 and 1962. Approximately 400 Cuban Jewish children were included. He is a professor at Florida International University and Barry University and is still close with his childhood friend, Enrique.

Raquel is Lilia's daughter Lisette's mother-in-law. She came to the US as an exile but her husband, Jose (known as Pepe) could not join her because he was in a labor camp trying to unlawfully leave the country. Pepe arrived in 1963. He was Sephardic, and their relationship was one of the rare intermarriages of Ashkenazi and Sephardic in Cuba. Pepe passed away in 2017.

SECOND GENERATION

David, my husband. is Lilia's middle child and is 57. He was born in New York and moved with his family to Miami when he was 10. Davis is the most interested in the family history of anyone in his immediate family, likely due to the fact that he grew up hearing stories from his maternal and paternal grandmothers about their lives in Eastern Europe and then Cuba.

Perry is Lilia's oldest son. He was also born in New York but has lived in South Florida since he was a teenager. He also has memories of his grandmothers and his grandfather on his mother's side.

Jodi is Perry's wife. Her family is not Cuban but having been with Perry and the family for more than 30 years, she offered valuable insight on the stories that have been passed down.

Lisette is Lilia's youngest child. She barely remembers their time in New York, as she was just 5 when the family moved to Miami. She admits she is not very "political," nor has she had that much interest in the family history but is proud to be Jewban.

Alan is Lisette's husband. His mother is Raquel, and his father was Pepe. He did not meet his father for several years due to his imprisonment in Cuba.

Jeff is David and Lisette's cousin, son of Lilia's brother Leon. Born in Miami, he is one of the few who left the geographic vicinity of his family, never to return.

Gregg is Jeff's brother, another cousin of David and Lisette. He, too, was born in Miami but left as an adult and has not returned to live near the family. He maintains a significant interest in the Jewban story.

THIRD GENERATION

Rachel B. is David's only daughter. She was born in Broward County, Florida. Her parents divorced when she was just one year old, so the way she was raised differed somewhat from the others in her generation.

Ashley is Perry's oldest daughter. She has done some research prior on the family tree and is inquisitive.

Scott is Ashley's husband. He is not Cuban but is Jewish and is interested in the family history. They just had a baby, Avery Skylar.

Stephanie is Perry's middle daughter. She worked for the organization Birthright for many years so is quite knowledgeable about Jewish history and Israel but less so about Cuban Jewish history.

Allan is Perry's youngest son. He is somewhat interested in Cuba today because he works in Major League Baseball and baseball is a passion in Cuba.

Paige is Lisette's oldest daughter. She expressed that she is not knowledgeable and knows much more about her dad's side than her mom's.

Dylan is Lisette's oldest son. Of this generation, he is the most knowledgeable about the family's history and the most interested in the Jewban experience.

Ethan is Lisette's youngest son, just finishing his first year at Vanderbilt University. He has more recently taken an interest in the family's history due to a course he took and a paper he had to write in which he interviewed a family member, Nathan (a cousin of Jack's), who had been separated from his mother during the Holocaust and raise in part by nuns in France.

DESCRIPTION OF THE CHAPTERS

In Part 1, I present a condensed history of the Jewban double diaspora. Chapter 1 focuses on Eastern European Jewish migration to Cuba. Although there was a small Cuban population on the island before the 1920s, it dramatically increased as Jews fled Eastern Europe due to antisemitism and lack of economic opportunity. My husband's grandparents all came at that time, and while all passed away well before I was part of the family, my research aimed to capture their stories the best I could through the recollections of their children and later generations as well as archival research and our own research in Cuba.

Chapter 2 features the stories and histories of Jewban exiles as a result of the Cuban revolution led by Fidel Castro in 1959. A double diaspora, as it has been described, this chapter highlights the reasons for the exodus, the receipt of Jewbans in the US., and their lives in yet another country. It provides, in brief, a historical review of the socio-political-economic factors that lead to the exodus. It also describes the emigres' reception in their new home. Although not exclusively about South Florida, the primary focus is on Jewbans located there. DiSipio noted that the pre-Revolutionary elite who made up the first wave of Cuban emigrants to Miami "brought with them higher levels of human capital than are customary in U.S. migration streams.

In Part 2, I share themes that emerged from interviews with three generations of Jewbans, all of which lived in South Florida for some time and most of whom still do.

Chapter 3 describes themes related to identity, family, and community that emerged from interviews with Jewbans. While prior research has found a strong Jewban identity, my research found a love of that title but more-so a Jewish, rather than Cuban, identity. This is connected to the diasporic history and socio-political situations both in Cuba and in the US.

Further, I emphasize what I have learned about community and how it was built and maintained amongst Jews in Cuba and Jewbans in South Florida. Unlike many immigrant groups in the US, Jewbans were able to develop and sustain community centers for their religious and cultural practices and thus helped keep

a very close-knit community. Exiles in particular looked to recreate the closeness of their Jewish community in Cuba and then lived and taught this to their kids in South Florida and, to some extent, their grandchildren who remained in the area.

Additionally, the chapter emphasizes the importance of family. Immigration is very much about family, but even the opportunity to emigrate with family members, let alone their opportunities for success, is in such large part due to family ties. Family is typically a "hook" that allows immigrants to bring others to the US, and this is in particular true of the exiles from Cuba. Further, family ties help situate new immigrants into places where they may have a fresh start, which was a significant part of the Jewbans' success, at least of those I interviewed. And family money and connections help immigrants to find housing, jobs, and other resources, which is a significant part of the success of the Jewban diaspora.

In Chapter 4 I address risk-taking, work ethic and resilience. As a double diaspora that had to restart their lives in challenging conditions twice, the Jewbans are decidedly risk-takers, especially when it comes to starting businesses. As a demographic, the Jewbans have been tremendously successful in South Florida. As Disipio (2003) wrote, "Although the specifics of Cuban migrant adaptation are often assumed rather than analyzed, it is fair to say that they have achieved political and economic success more rapidly than other contemporary migrant populations" (p. 208). Interviewees repatedly stressed the emphasis of hard work, often at the expense of much leisure. Further, they emphasized the resilience of their people through each immigration transition. This, however, was more attributed to being Jewish than to being Jewban.

Chapter 5, "Idealized Cuba," discusses the memories of Cuba that have been passed along the generations of interviewees. All but one described pre-revolutionary Cuba in glowing terms. They tell of the island's beauty, its opportunities, and its lack of racism and other forms of discrimination. A read of history, however, suggests that this narrative may be through partially rose-colored glasses.

Part 2 addresses themes that were either minimally noted or not at all, yet would have been expected given social, historical and political history. In each chapter, I discuss why I believe these themes did not resonate with these interviewees.

Chapter 6 focuses on privilege. Much has been written about Cuban immigration privilege (See Eckstein, 2009; Eckstein, 2022). Immigration privileges were granted in the Cold War era and most remain today. These are privileges in status and benefits that were not afforded to any other immigrant group. The Cuban Relief Act, for instance, provided job training, cash assistance, employment opportunities, food, and various other forms of indirect aid to the state of Florida and to Miami Dade County (DiSipio, 2003). The interviewees were largely unaware of those privileges, even some of the exiles who were direct recipients.

Chapter 7 describes the political situation in Cuba post-exile through today. Again, interviewees professed to being largely unaware and generally disinterested despite the Cuban background. This is dissimilar from most immigrant groups,

who have family and friends in their home country and who thus are incentivized to stay informed on current affairs.

In the Conclusion, I offer final comments from my position as a member of the family who is White, non-religious American with Irish and British roots. I also offer implications for peace educators and recommendations for future research.

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PART 1

HISTORY OF THE JEWBAN DIASPORA

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CHAPTER 1

THE FIRST JEWS IN CUBA UNTIL REVOLUTIONARY CUBA

As an outsider, the idea that Eastern European immigrants fleeing persecution landed in Cuba was foreign to me. I was taught, as are most in the United States, that Americans were the big saviors of those seeking a better life. I had no idea Cuba had any role as a refuge for Jews. I guess I presumed that when people were leaving Eastern Europe due to pogroms and then the Holocaust, it was to come to the welcoming shores of the United States. It turns out that there is much about immigration policy in the United States in the 1920s through 1940s that I knew truly little about. As I expressed in the Introduction, I knew little about Cuba when I grew up in rural Michigan, so my images and ideas were all about a Caribbean island that was run by a brutal communist dictator. I did not have a sense of the history of Cuba, the population and why they were there, and how that related to US geopolitical, economic, and social issues. This was largely due to persecution during the 1900s, in particular the periods of the World Wars, although there was a small Jewish population on the island before those times. This chapter reviews what drove migration from Eastern Europe to Cuba, the experiences of Jews and their reception in Cuba, and significant policy decisions that shaped Jews' successes in their new home.

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David's maternal and paternal grandparents all left Eastern Europe—Belarus and Poland—for Cuba in the 1920s and 1930s. His paternal grandfather David Bekerman was born in Warsaw in 1902. Paternal grandmother Etel Marja Lederman Kusherman (birth date uncertain, but around 1905) was born in Kozienice, Poland. They arrived in Cuba some time in the 1920s. Image 1.1 is a photo of Eva and David. Etel took on the name Eva in Cuba. David's maternal grandparents Nachama Shapiro and Ycko (who became known as Isaac) Szczygiel arrived in Cuba in the 1930s. Image 1.2 is a photo of Nachama and Isaac. Nachama came as an eleven-year-old girl with her parents Leizer (also referred to as Lazaro) Shapiro and Basia, who became known as Berta (Dainowkski). Images 1.3 and 1.4 are of Nachama and Ycko's passports. Their motivation was to flee persecution, as is well documented and makes sense. However, they were also seeking new economic opportunities, as Cuba's economy was thriving. Like many, they intended to come to the United States eventually, but policy changes described in this chapter prevented them from doing so until after the Cuban Revolution. Lilia recalls how her parents and others in their generation described the hope that Cuba provided but also the challenges—new climate, culture, language, and more.

IMAGE 1.1. David and Eva Bekerman

IMAGE 1.2. Consuelo and Isaac Schigiel

IMAGE 1.3. Nachama Shapiro Passport

IMAGE 1.4. Ycko Szczygiel Passport

BRIEF HISTORY OF JEWS IN CUBA PRE-1900

The earliest recorded Jew to visit Cuba came with Christopher Columbus. In March 1492, Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain issued the Alhambra decree, which required that all Jews in Spain convert to Christianity or be expelled by the end of July. There were approximately 300,000 Spanish Jews and the decree prompted an estimated 175,000 to leave Spain (Bannister, 2022). That same year, Luis de Torres, a Spanish Jew who had actually converted, was hired by Christopher Columbus to serve as an interpreter on his voyages. He is considered the first Jew to visit Cuba, which he did for four days doing their reconnaissance mission (Sarna, 1992). Two other Jewish converts were reportedly with de Torres, Juan de Cabrera and Rodrigo de Triano. Jews who converted, like these men, were called *marranos* or *conversos*. Many *conversos* settled in Cuba following de Torres, but little is known about them and their Jewish ancestry. Columbus described Cuba as "the loveliest land ever beheld by human eyes" (Levine, 1993, p. 8). The West Indies' Inquisition records contain lists of suspected Judaizers. One of those *marranos*, Hernando de Castro, built the first sugar mill near Santiago and is considered the pioneer of the sugar industry on the island (Shaland, 2017). In 1510, the Spanish conquered Cuba and in 1514 established the city of Santiago, which served as the capital from 1522 to 1563 before it was moved to the growing port city of Havana. Being Jewish was not allowed in Cuba at the time and to demonstrate one's Judaism could result in profound consequences, including death. In 1613 a man named Francisco Gomez de Leon was executed for "Judaizing" and his fortune was confiscated.

In the 16th and 17th century Jews fleeing from Portugal in Brazil landed in Cuba (Franklin, 2016). In 1762 the British briefly captured Havana but traded it to France in exchange for Florida just ten months later. For the most part, however, Cuba was under Spanish rule until nearly 1900. Known for its brutal Inquisition, Spain extended that to Cuba, its primary location in the Caribbean (Falcon, 2018). Puerto Rico and Cuba were the last strongholds for Spanish rule, as they were strategically essential to the imperialist country. Meanwhile Cuba was booming with the sugar trade. After the Inquisition was banned in Spain in 1834, Sephardic and some Ashkenazic Jews began to move to Cuba.

Slavery was a significant part of the development of the island's economy. This included the Indigenous Tainos as well as the Atlantic slave trade and later, slaves from China. More than 600,000 slaves were brought to Cuba in the 19th century (Hansing, 2018). Slavery in Cuba was an integral part in allowing the US to thrive. A greater percent of the 12.5 million enslaved Africans who were forced to come to the Americas from 1501 to 1867 were taken to Cuba than to North America—seven percent compared to four percent. Farber (2015) explained that, like in the United States, the darker a slave's skin, the worse he or she was treated. From 1847 to the 1880s, Chinese men were brought to the island to work on the sugar plantation amidst the ending of formal slavery. They were brutally exploited, perhaps worse than were the slaves before them. Slavery was abolished

in Cuba in 1886, making it the second-to-last country in the Americas to abolish it (Behar, 1995. This was in large part due to Cuba's growing sugar industry and the country's belief that to outlaw slavery would put the economy in serious jeopardy (Bejarano, 1997). Farber (2015, p. 4) explained that

> slavery, in general, directly contributed to the expansion of capitalism. Furthermore, with this direct link to the future of capitalism, slavery also contributed to the onset of future issues and contingencies of racial, class and gender inequalities experienced throughout Cuba.

At this time, few Jews were on the island. Jewish immigrants were allowed to enter Cuba legally for the first time in 1881. The Catholic Church supported Spain and instilled hostility toward Jews in Cuba (Bejarano, 1997).

Most of the Jews in Cuba supported the effort for independence led by José Julián Martí y Pérez. Martí, as he is usually referred, was born to Spanish parents. His father was a Sargeant in the Spanish army, and his maternal grandfather was a decorated soldier for the Spanish military in Cuba. Martí, however, opposed Spain's colonial rule from an early age. As a teen, Martí was briefly a political prisoner because he wrote a letter to a peer discouraging him from joining the Spanish army. He was released and exiled to Spain, where he continued to write criticisms of Spanish colonialism in Cuba. Martí studied law in Spain, earning a law degree specializing in civil rights. After brief stints as a writer in Mexico and Guatemala, Martí returned to Cuba in 1878. After only a brief time he was accused of conspiring to overthrow Spanish rule and was again exiled to Spain. Martí then moved to New York City, where he continued to agitate for Cuban independence with other exiles. In 1895, Martí, Máximo Gómez, and Antonio Maceo Grajales launched an insurrection on the island, amassing a small group of guerillas to attack. Martí was killed but his efforts helped Cuba gain independence after the Spanish-American War in 1898 (Minster, 2019). In 1898 a cavalry led by Theodore Roosevelt stormed San Juan Hill, captured the city, thereby ending the Spanish American War and the Cuban War for Independence (Shaland, 2017). Franklin (2016), commented on the Jews support for Martí and independence.

> The one thing that the Jews subscribe to and speak openly about today is the teaching of José Martí. Fidel Castro is rarely mentioned, but Martí is highly visible in the common areas of all of the synagogues, either in the form of a bronze bust (as in the Patronado), on posters, in books, and in conversations (p. 16).

This observation is not consistent with what I found. None of the interviewees mentioned Martí nor had any visited any of the South Florida landmarks to him.

Martí and his comrades had support from American Jews, especially in South Florida, where many supported the Cuban Revolutionary Party (Bejarano, 1997). Although the island was free from Spanish rule, the Platt Amendment of 1901 gave the United States hegemonic power to intervene in Cuban affairs at any time in order to, "maintain a government adequate for the protection of life, liberty,

and individual property[in Cuba]" (Piccone & Miller, 2016). It also granted the United States power to obtain property for a military naval base, which it holds to this day. It is the infamous Guantanamo Bay, whereas of this writing thirty detainees remain from the War on Terror after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack. As a result of the Platt Amendment, Cuba was left controlling almost nothing on the island. All Cuban products were immediately exported to the United States. The US ensured as well that the Cuban government was revamped to align with U.S. interests (Piccone & Miller, 2016). The US wanted to purchase Cuba but was never able to do so, despite efforts by several presidential administrations (Ferrer, 2022). During these military occupations American Jews came to the island as soldiers, military suppliers, or merchants. Many were attracted by the opportunities for investment but when they arrived they intended to replicate their American environment in Cuba (Shaland, 2017). Cuba also became more open to immigration after the war. At the same time, economic and political instability in Europe drove many, including Jews, to leave. Steinberg (N.D.) maintains that Jews chose Cuba because it represented a chance for economic mobility and for religious acceptance. When the United States controlled Cuba, "race, class and gender issues continued to magnify, resulting in inequalities that are still apparent in the fabric of Cuban culture" (Farber, 2015, p. 14). While the US engaged in significant public works and infrastructure projects, including roads, bridges, power plants, schools, and more, many were unhappy that Cuba had "rid themselves of one colonial power but got another" (Powell, 2022, p. 7). Politically, the situation was somewhat chaotic in Cuba, as the island had fifteen permanent or interim presidents and two provisional governors sent by the US between 1902 and 1952, as well as many other changes (Powell, 2022).

JEWS IN CUBA, EARLY 1900s

Between 1902–1914 approximately 5,700 Jews, mostly Sephardim from Turkey and Syria, immigrated to Cuba. The island was attractive in part due to a surge in US investments that dramatically bolstered the sugar industry, offering many job opportunities, largely to young men. These Jews formed the first Jewish places of worship. Further, Cuba declared freedom of religion in its 1902 constitution. The Subsequent constitutions of 1928 and 1940 also enshrined freedom of religion and separation of church and state. These factors, coupled with its proximity to the US, made Cuba a welcome location for Jews fleeing persecution (Glaser, 2015). Ashkenazic American Jews began to arrive after the war for independence as well. In 1906, eleven US Jews formed the United Hebrew Congregation in Havana, which became the heart of the American Jewish community on the island. When Jews wanted to build a cemetery, they were denied, showing that the commitment to religious equality was not as firm as the government claimed. They then sought assistance from the United Hebrew Congregation which intervened because most of its members were American Jews (Bejarano, 1997). In 1910 the United Hebrew Congregation consecrated Beth Ha Haim, the first Jewish cem-