THE JEWISH LIVED EXPERIENCE IN CUBA

by

DOROTHY DUGGAR FRANKLIN

A DISSERTATION

NATALIE ADAMS, CO-CHAIRPERSON
UTZ MCKNIGHT, CO-CHAIRPERSON
DIANNE BRAGG
JERRY ROSENBERG
KAREN SPECTOR

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ABSTRACT

This research utilized an interdisciplinary qualitative approach to inquiry that requires border-crossing as its methodology for discovery in order to fully understand the lived experience of the Jews of Cuba. The study included a deep read of the Jewish Diaspora with a starting point being 597 BCE, then followed thousands of years of waves and world-wide movements, eventually leading to those Jews who settled in Cuba. For access into the lives of the present-day Jews, interviews with four participants who represented a cross-section of the Cuban Hebrew community were conducted; visits to the synagogues and to the kosher butcher shop were made; and many trips to the Ashkenazi and the Sephardic cemeteries in Guanabacoa, Cuba, were also made in order to take photographs and personally visit the sites. The four respondents interviewed were English speakers, were over 20-years old, and were citizens of Cuba. They were asked identical questions via e-mail with follow-up correspondence. For other narrative resources, 19 unpublished recorded stories were transcribed and included in the study to gain further access into the lives of Cuba's Jewish population. To complete the inquiry, one published narrative was used to show parallels between those who were interviewed, as well as to show the similarities to those voices from the unpublished group. The end research result finds that today's Cuban Jews, whose rich historical past on the island began as early as 1492, have survived despite all odds, and thrive with their traditions and laws intact. This research covered a period of 4 years—and four separate trips to Cuba.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND METHODS

> Jews are a people who won't let go of the dead. The dead are honored through the recitation of the Kaddish at religious services. When Jews build temples, they cover the walls with the names of the dead. But before they build temples of worship, Jews build cemeteries. They want to be buried amid Stars of David. They want to be with members of the tribe when they return to dust. (Behar, 2007a, p. 41)

This dissertation began in May, 2012, on my first trip to Cuba with The University of Alabama Study Abroad Program. The reason for the trip with the English department was to trace the footprints of Hemingway in Cuba. However, one special topics assignment led me to the Ashkenazi and Sephardic cemeteries in Guanabacoa, Cuba. My appreciation and love of cemeteries reaches far back into my childhood when families gathered on the first Sunday of May for "decoration day." This day was for cleaning, placing flowers, picnicking, and socializing; a day set aside especially for remembering. Here I was in Cuba in May amidst a field of Stars of David. The inspiration for this research came from these two cemeteries, from this landscape. It was as if the world had opened up and my vision was clear: each Star represented a narrative. I knew I wanted to research the lived experiences of the Jews of Cuba. I was so empowered that I felt nothing could stop me from this project, not even two governments.[1]

[1] It is important to note that in May of 2012 the United States Embargo of Cuba was still in effect and remained so for my next three research trips to Cuba.

Defining "Lived Experience"

In order to understand how the Cuban Jewish lived experience is established, first one must define exactly what is meant by "lived experience," and how it applies to the Hebrew community in today's Havana. The term "lived experience" was described as the "construction of experiences." Or in other words, "to live through something" (Andermahr, Lovell, & Wolkowitz, 1997, p. 197). Continuing, Andermahr et al. claimed that the lived experience narrative can also be considered a personal narrative (2000, p. 197), and in qualitative analysis, the term is described as an analysis of a work that ". . . seeks to describe the meaning of experience for those who frequently are socially marginalized or oppressed as they construct stories (narratives) about their lives" (Marshall & Rossman, 2001, p. 22). According to Andermahr, "Although the textual deconstruction of a personal narrative inevitably brings the truth claims of the narrative into question, it is arguably progressive if it illuminates the cultural politics involved in the narrative's construction" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 198). A problem that arises is the "power relation" between narrator and author, which invariably brings about ethical questions with "control of the test" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 197). "In recent feminist qualitative research there is an emphasis on the knowledge potentials of feelings, empathy, and the personal dimension in human intervention, including research interviews" (Kavale, 2009, p. 295).

If this is the case, the historic Jewish Diaspora and their voices must be considered in order to appreciate the importance of the narratives of today's Cuban Jews, for there is no question that Jews have been marginalized and persecuted. Therefore, if one accepts theorist Pierre Bourdieu as an authority on cultural production and its effects on one's lived experience, then his words which state, ". . . beginning obviously with the code of everyday life, and that this

capacity is acquired through association . . . throughout the experience . . . history . . . **(**1993, p. 227) are crucial to understanding the Jews of Cuba and their intersection, not only with each other's differences, but their intersections with the many races, ethnicities, and religions inhabiting Cuba, as well. Bourdieu's work alongside Sigmund Freud's study on how lived traditions become "memory traces" (Bergstein, 2010; Malmstrom, n.d.) presented a model for inquiry of the Jews who remain on the island. Because of his Jewish heritage, another point to ponder is Freud's self-examination on speaking about this subject to Sandor Ferenczi, stating that he felt, ". . . strange secret longings—perhaps from the legacy of my forebears . . ." (Bergstein, 2010, p. 36), claiming that archaic heritage operates unconsciously in people, but affects their connections to society (Bocock, 2014). If Bourdieu's "code" (or cultural production) of the ancient Jews is associated with the diaspora, then with Freud's theory of "Archaic Memory," then one must hypothesize that these theories play an important role in the Cuban Jewish lived experience. There is no question that Jews, no matter where they live, have "lived through something." For the Jews who live in Cuba today, the question asked most often is how did they get to Cuba and how do they live today? Thus, the topic for this paper, "The Jewish Lived Experience in Cuba."

Project Development

This research drew from personal narratives of Jews living in Cuba. I interviewed four English-speaking Cuban Jews using an interview protocol (see Appendix A). Because of travel constraints, I asked the participants to respond via email, giving each identical copies of the questions. My instructions were for them to answer only what they felt comfortable with and I explained that my research was for the purpose of writing about the Jewish lived experience in Cuba. I also explained that this work would result in a dissertation paper for the Interdisciplinary

Ph.D. Program at The University of Alabama. Data also came from informal conversations I had with various individuals during my four trips to the island. I also used interviews previously recorded by the Sephardic Synagogue for their Holocaust Memorial which is located in their activity building. These were given to me to use in my research by a high-ranking official of the synagogue. I transcribed each of these interviews. I also took photographs of cemeteries in Cuba during my first visit to the island and, consequently, on the following three trips, spoke extensively to members of each of the three synagogues about these cemeteries. By showing my photographs, I learned in which cemetery their loved ones rested. Based on my analysis of the interviews and photographs, I organized this dissertation around three primary themes: Arriving in Cuba; Community and Blendedness; and Death, Dying, and Cemeteries.

CHAPTER II

ARRIVING IN CUBA

History of Jewish Movement

> The Egyptian, the Babylonian, the Persian, rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away . . . other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now or have vanished. The Jew saw them, beat them all . . . all things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains, what is the secret of his immortality? (Mark Twain, 1899, cited in Jews in America, n.d., p. 15)

It is necessary to look at the Jewish historical past and its tribal movements before one can arrive at a clear understanding of how the Jews reached Cuba. For the Hebrew people, their roots were founded with their rebellions against persecutors which set in motion their movements beginning before the Roman/Jewish Wars, with a continuum of diaspora throughout the Middle-Ages.

The practice of deporting of Jews (population movement) can be located in texts about the time of the Chaldean conquest of Jerusalem around 597 BCE, although it was the standard even before that time in the area around Mesopotamia (Shiffman, 1991, p. 17). The Chaldean lands are basically located in the low, marshy, alluvial land and estuaries of the Tigris and Euphrates, whose run-off leads to the sea (now the Persian Gulf) (Shiffman, 1991, p. 82). After their defeat, Jews were confined to one community in Babylon, the capital city of the Chaldean empire. Judah was no longer an independent kingdom, which meant that the Jews were without

a homeland, state, or nation. This period in Jewish history is called the "Exile" (Cohen, 1999, p. 120). Thus began the long trek (diaspora) for all Jews, including those who ended up in Cuba.[2]

Dates of Arrival

The astonishing fact is that Jews first visited the Island of Cuba with Columbus in 1492. Three documented Jews were among Columbus's 1492 crew on the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria. Their names were Luis de Torres, Juan de Cabera, and Rodrigo de Triana and they were marranos (i.e., "secret" Jews[3]). Jews were forced to become Catholics in their homeland of Spain (Levine, 1993). Isabella and Ferdinand had decreed that all Spanish Jews must convert or be expelled, or worse (Levine, 1993). It is interesting to note that in describing the island, Columbus declared it, ". . . the loveliest land ever beheld by human eyes" (Levine, 1993, p. 8). Columbus left Torres and 39 crew on the Island of Hispaniola for 1 year and on his return, he found all of the men had been killed (Levine, 1993). In 1510, the Spanish conquered the Island of Cuba and in 1514, Havana was founded on its southern coast (Levine, 1993). In 1613, in the record of Cuba's Spanish founding (including Cuba's Jewry), it shows that there was no escape for Jews from persecution even though they were far away from their previous homeland of Spain and by 1519, the Holy Inquisition against Jews of Spain had reached Cuba. Spanish Jews were hunted and exposed as conversos, or "Secret Jews" (Levine, 1993, p. 9). Francisco Gomez de Leon, as is recorded, was sought out and captured as a converso. He was a merchant who was tried in Havana and executed (Levine, 1993) in Cartagena. For the Jews of Portugal during the 16th and 17th centuries, their escape from persecution led their diaspora to Cuba from Brazil (Levine, 1993). These industrious immigrants established a trade route that took them as far

[2] For a more comprehensive history of the Jewish Diaspora, see Appendix B.

[3] Secret Jews were those Jews who continued to practice Jewish Law although they had been forced to convert to Catholicism.

away as Amsterdam and Hamburg. However, due to constant anti-Semitic violence (both real and symbolic), many just simply assimilated into Catholic Cuba (Levine, 1993).

Robert M. Levine wrote that the largest wave of Jewish immigrants ". . . was from Turkey, the lands of the Mediterranean, and North Africa" (1993, p. 20). They were Sephardim, ". . . the Hebrew name for Spain, Sepharad" (Levine, 1993, p. 20). "They spoke a language of mixed Hebrew and Renaissance Spanish . . . and [wrote] in Rashi letters, a variant of Hebrew script" (Levine, 1993, p. 20). According to Levine, their ancestors were among more than 200,000 Jews expelled by Ferdinand and Isabella after the fall of the ". . . Muslim Empire at Granada on January 2, 1492, Jewish homeland for four centuries" (Levine, 1993, p. 20). A minority of Jews spoke Greek as did another small group from the Byzantine Jewry, according to Levine. He wrote, "In all, some 140,000 Jews lived within the borders of the Ottoman state in 1911" (1993, p. 20). The Ottoman Empire had offered "safe haven to the exiles (both Jewish and Muslim" who had been expelled from Span's territories. "Most of the Sephardic Jews who came to Cuba in the early twentieth-century were descendants of the late-fifteenth century Jewish exiles from the Iberian peninsula…" (Levine, 1993, p. 20).

Interestingly, as most consider Jews to be mainly associated with business enterprises (the accepted myth), in Cuba there is evidence of their being involved with agriculture. Early records show that in 1762, during a 10-month period of English occupation of Cuba, "international trade was opened up and Jewish merchants were permitted to sail with the English fleet led by Admiral George Pocock who had captured Havana the previous summer" (Levine, 1993, p. 10). By that time, Jews had helped established the sugar industry. Hernando de Castro, called "the father of Cuban sugar industry," was with Pocock's fleet along with Jacob Franks, a New York-based Jewish merchant. Franks was known for working with Jews of Cuba,

importing thousands of slaves to them under British occupation, to use as workers in the sugar-cane fields. By the late 1800s, many Jews from the Dutch Antilles had also settled in Cuba. They supported Jose Marti, the liberator of Cuba from Spanish colonial rule in 1898. Finally, in 1904, due to the growing Jewish diaspora to the island, a Jewish congregation was founded in Havana (Levine, 1993, pp. 9-11).

According to Margalit Bejarano,

> The legal basis for the entry of Jews into Cuba was formed during the military occupation by the United States (1898-1902), when the principles of religious freedom and separation between church and state were operative also in Cuba. These principles, however, were totally in accordance with the opinions of the founders of the Cuban republic, many of whom had been Freemasons and critics of the Catholic Church that had opposed Cuban Independence. Unlike other countries in Latin America, where separation between church and state was reached after protracted conflict between liberals and conservatives, religion had never been an issue among the advocates of Cuban freedom, whose people they considered "the least believing [Catholic people] in the whole globe." (1991, p. 117)[4]

Continuing, Bejarano wrote

> Thus the entry of Jewry immigrants into Cuba did not arouse any dormant prejudices, but was rather accepted as that of any other European group, according to the personal impressions they had made on the Cuban people and to the economic and political circumstances at the time of immigration. Jews were nicknamed after their major countries of origin: *Turcos* (Turks) or *Polacos* (Poles). The image of the poor *Polaco* peddler selling ties became part of Cuban folklore. The Jewish *Turcos* were not considered a distinct group, but were rather identified with other immigrants from the Middle East, mainly Syrians and Lebanese, or with their Ashkenazi co-religionists. (1991, p. 117)[5]

From a poster in the Sephardic Synagogue in Vedado, are words that indicate the extreme stress for Jews before arriving in Cuba:

> . . . what the generation of Cuban Hebrews (Jews) wanted to remember, the generation before them tried to forget. In order to rebuild a living community . . . they would need help. . . . Numerous foreign organizations offered assistance and

[4] Bejarano cited this reference from *Diario de Sesiones de la Convention Consstituyente de la Isla de Cuba*, Havana, 7+ January 1901, p. 216; L. Bethel, "A Note on Church and the Independence of Latin America," *Cambridge History of Latin America, III* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 223-230.

[5] Bejarano cited this reference from Antonio Nuez Jimenez, *Grografia de Cuba* (A Havana, 1959), p. 173.

> support, and individual synagogues provided support as well as non-institutional solidarity groups . . . Jews, non-Jews, and Cuban Jews living elsewhere—all stepped in to help rebuild Jewish life in Cuba as you see it today. (*We Remember,* 2013)

Culture

Jaclyn A. Steinberg, in her historiographical article published by Emory University (n.d.), wrote that when Fidel Castro came into power on January 1, 1959, the Jewish community in Cuba was a thriving part of Cuba's prosperous middle-class. At that time, there were over 15,000 Jews living in Cuba. They were productive citizens and had woven themselves into the culture of Cuba seamlessly since their first immigration in 1902. Steinberg's account delved into the social, religious, political, and economic mindset which was represented during those early years up to their massive migration post Castro's takeover. Steinberg's research provides certain aspects of Cuban Jewish migration from one country to another, giving analysis of their innate qualities and their continuous search for autonomy through history (Steinberg, 2007, pp. 1-4).

In the first wave of Jewish immigrants who came into Cuba and settled in the years between 1902 and 1914, approximately 5,700 made it their home. They were mostly of Sephardim heritage from Turkey and Syria. This group assimilated well because of their native language, Ladino, which was similar to Spanish, which made the Cuban government very tolerant. The United States Quota Act of 1921 stimulated the second wave of Jewish immigrants into Cuba because it was designed to favor Northern and Western immigrants into the United States rather than those from Southern and Eastern countries. This second wave of Jews (which took place just after World War I consisting mostly of those who left the Ottoman Empire) came because the island promised hope and opportunity. They were escaping a decline in the Balkan states brought on by the change in regime. They were also escaping religious persecution (Steinberg, 2007., pp. 4-8).

The Jewish people who immigrated early to Cuba created an economic foundation for later immigrants. But it was the United States Quota Act of 1921 that stimulated an environment in Cuba as an extended stopover for Jews wishing to migrate to the United States. Half of the 25,000 Jews who migrated to Cuba during the time between 1918 and 1947 stayed and made Cuba their home. In Cuba, Jews found a haven that suited their search for autonomy with religious freedom and economic mobility. The earliest immigrants had created an economic foundation for the later immigrants; even though the first immigrants were mostly poor and unskilled, they took service jobs that later became factory jobs. This transformed unskilled labor into the skilled column and also attracted professional middle-class business entrepreneurs (Steinberg, n.d., p. 6). They not only created better jobs for their own community, but also for all Cubans. "In a remarkable span of less than fifty years, Jews in Cuba transformed from poor unskilled workers to professional middle-class . . ." (Steinberg, n.d., p. 6).

Steinberg's research involved the contention that Jews are economically motivated through genetic predisposition and that they possess innate qualities that make them incompatible in socialist societies. (Steinberg, n.d., p. 3) She contends that Dana Evan Kaplan dismissed this as the motive[6] for why Jews left Cuba in the 1960s, but believes that many Jews left Castro's Cuba because there was no free market and they had no way to sustain their businesses. The result was that they were affected by Castro's redistribution of wealth through the nationalization of industry (Steinberg, n.d., p. 3). Steinberg, although complimentary of Jay Levinson's research on the Cuban Jewish population[7] (Steinberg, n.d. p. 3), found an oversimplification in his work as he ignored the complexities behind Jewish migration, simply

[6] Disputes the theory of Henry Harpending and Gregory Cochran's work found in "*Natural History of the Ashkenazi Intelligence."*

[7] Jay Levinson. *Jewish Community of Cuba.*

stating that the Jews were incompatible with the new communist regime and its economic policy. Steinberg pointed out that Jennifer Senior posed the proposition that the Jews did not choose capitalism, it was their only way to survive; therefore, they were forced to leave Cuba (Steinberg, n.d. p. 3). Steinberg's theory about the Jews of Cuba was ". . . the preservation of autonomy is the one universal truth of the Jewish people because it is freedom that holds the key to survival" (Steinberg, n.d. p. 14).

CHAPTER III

COMMUNITY AND BLENDEDNESS

Present Day Jewish Community

> Individual and culture maturity require a sense of separation of identity of uniqueness but also the ability to cooperate with others. (Zerbe, 2001, p. 13)

The Jews of the first and second diasporic waves into Cuba paved the way for the present day Hebrew community. In order to survive, those first Jews had to learn how to adjust and to blend, even with each other. Distinctness existed among members of their own culture in which languages differences, ethnicity differences, and geographic differences were huge. Also, most, especially those from colder climates, had to adjust to the tropics of Cuba. Yet the groups had a commonality, a bond: they were Jewish. Jews, throughout their historic movements have learned that to survive they must be autonomous; to stand out meant persecution. This idea they carried with them to Cuba, so lived in small groups. Even so, during the Second World War, the Nazi cloud was present in Cuba. Then there were morality issues, by association, during the Lansky era; another problem in another era to deal with. All the while, the Ashkenazi and the Sephardic divide continued along philosophical, religious, and political lines. Castro's atheistic emergence and nationalization of all businesses changed this separateness. A sense of protective togetherness developed between the two communities. They began to assimilate more into the Cuban culture as well as blurring the lines dividing Sephardi and Ashkenazi. And through all of these changes they evolved as compatible; blended, yet uniquely distinct.

Community is essential for Jewish cultural identity survival, both for the elderly and for the young. Currently, for the young Jews in Havana, there are classes in Hebrew and Jewish Law. There are about 100 children who come to learn about their culture in the Patronato[8] after they have spent the better part of the day in public school. Not only are the youth cared for, so are the elderly Jews in all three synagogues in the Havana area. The synagogues hold lessons for seniors such as exercise classes, story-telling time, informational learning, sewing and craft-making functions, meal time, and social celebrations. For the senior citizens, these gatherings serve not only as social functions, but as a way of keeping close watch on the elderly.

There is no rabbi to serve the Jewish communities. According to the Orthodox synagogue lay-person, there is not enough money for the Jews to support a rabbi. They, however, send for one who comes about once a year from either Spain or the Dominican Republic to fulfill the duties of a resident rabbi. For example, in 2012, a visiting rabbi performed 19 weddings at one time, resulting in a huge celebration.

A very important factor for the Hebrew community has been the presence of their kosher butcher shop, even after 1959. Fidel Castro, although under his strict governmental watch, allowed the Jewish community to keep the kosher butcher shop open. Today, the shop is still located in Havana Vieja, near the Orthodox Synagogue (Adath Israel), and welcomes the entire community as it always has, not restricting sales to only Jews. The animals are grown in a rural section of Cuba and slaughtered according to kosher law (see Appendix B). Jewish Law is very strict concerning meat consumption. The commandment in the Torah states that any Jew who eats meat must follow kosher law. This is taken from Deuteronomy 12:21, and reads, “Thou shalt slaughter of thy herd and of thy flock, which the Lord hath given thee, as I have

[8] Ashkenazi Cultural center and Synagogue in Vedado, Cuba.

commanded thee, and thou shalt eat within thy gates, after all the desire of thy soul." (NIV Holy Bible, 1973, p. 294). In *My Jewish Learning,* Rabbi Gersion Appel wrote,

> The commandment applies equally to cattle, to animals, and to fowl. A limb torn or cut from a living animal is forbidden. An animal that is not slaughtered, but dies of itself, is prohibited. The laws regarding the precise method of slaughter . . . were given orally to Moses on Mount Sinai, as indicated in the verse by the statement, "as I have commanded thee," that is as I have already instructed you. (The function of this previous sentence is to make a link between rabbinically developed laws regarding implementation of these laws and what is traditionally understood as the revelation—of both oral and written Torah (which can be translated as both "teaching" and "law")—at Sinai). (Appel, n.d.)

Cuban Jews can identify with the above quote because of their dedication to both the oral and written Torah instructions of "teaching" and "law" regarding their eating of kosher meat. In general conversations, they ask "Have you visited the kosher butcher shop?"[9] The shop is seen by the government as a cultural, not religious, establishment because it served the whole Cuban community, not just the Jews, which it still does today.

Religion and Politics

The Castro revolution, like all good Communist revolutions, held to the tenet of atheism. All churches were closed and service forbidden. The synagogues were allowed to stay open, perhaps because they were seen as centers of a cultural communities in addition to their religious activities. There were no rabbis, but the 400 Jews remaining in Cuba still gathered in small groups and minions for the Sabbath. This allowed them to maintain their identity and pass traditions on to the children. Perhaps Castro's own genealogy led him to allow these activities to continue.

Tom Miller, an American journalist who visited Havana in the 1990s, on writing about Fidel Castro, had this to say:

> Fidel Castro thinks he's Jewish. Or at least part Jewish, buried in his past. "Castro" is among the more common names of Marranos, Spanish Jews who took on Christian

[9] Personal experience.

> identity during the Inquisition to avoid certain death at the stake. Fidel mentioned his heritage in private to Ricardo Subirana y Lovo, a chemical engineer and financial backer of the Revolution to whom he gave a diplomatic post in Israel in 1960. Castro, historian Maurice Halperin has written, "apparently was convinced that some of his ancestors were Marranos." (2003, p. 509)

Miller also stated that Fidel Castro is not a "good Jew" because he does not attend Rosh Hashanah services nor does he shop at the kosher butcher shop, although he did allow it to continue in operation where "black, mulatto, and white Sephardim, Ashkenazim, and their descendants pass through the door with two-metal Stars of David . . ." (2003, p. 510). Another question by Miller to Dorian, then the executive secretary of the Patronato, was, "Is there discrimination against Jews here?" (Miller, 2003, p. 512). The reply was straight-forward with no hesitation,

> There is no anti-Semitism in Cuba . . . We all get along. Even the PLO has an embassy here. They send thousands of students to Cuba every year. We coexist. There wasn't discrimination against Jews even before the Revolution. I've never seen anyone throw an egg at a synagogue. Never." (Miller, 2003, p. 512)

Dworin, continuing her conversation with Miller concerning the Central Committee of the Communist Party which had an office of religious affairs (1960s) was,

> . . . [The committee was] headed by Dr. Jose Felipe Carmeado. He was a member of the first Communist Party in Cuba. He was a mulatto lawyer, so he knows what discrimination is. Of course, if you are a member of a religion, you can't join the Communist Party, so we have people who come here but don't claim to be Jewish, and some who even give money, but with no record of it. They come on the traditional holidays, and they're interested in reading about Judaism. Fidel said that someday believers will be members of the Party. (Miller, 2003, p. 512)

The Patronato library is filled with books written in Hebrew, Spanish, German, and English[10]. Albert Einstein visited the synagogue in Havana in 1930, which created a cause for celebration. Adela Dworin had this to say concerning the fact that there has been no rabbi after

[10] Personal observation. I was allowed to select any books to study and read while in the library.

the Revolution, “Jews don’t need a rabbi for services. Someone simply has to know how to read the Torah. We’ve had rabbis visit us from Mexico and Venezuela.”(Miller, 2003, p. 512). Today, Dworin holds the most responsible position in the Patronato as their President after the death in 2002 of Dr. Miller.

An Orthodox Synagogue remains in Old Havana and is strictly a “religious” community. I am not sure about the other two synagogues, although they teach Hebrew to their children and follow the “Laws.” It is possible to be Jewish and not religious, just ethnic even though the Law is practiced. According to Yosef Yerushalmi, a Jewish historian, “I have emphasized that modern Jewish historiography can never substitute for Jewish memory” (1982, p. 101). He believed that history of the Jews is an exercise in memory that captures the Jewish experience, quoting Deuteronomic history, “Remember the days of old, consider the years of ages past” (Deut. 32:7), also stating ,”Memory is, by its nature, selective . . .” (Yerushalmi, 1982, p. 10).

The one thing that the Jews subscribe to and speak openly about today is the teaching of Jose Marti. Fidel Castro is rarely mentioned, but Marti is highly visible in the common areas of all of the synagogues, either in the form of a bronze bust (as in the Patranado), on posters, in books, and in conversations[11]. Community oriented, the Cuban Jews follow Marti’s paradigm for socialism. The interest in Marti, who was born on January 28, 1853 in Havana, began long before today’s Cuban Jewry was born. But their great grandparents and grandparents took note when he became a symbol of struggle against Spain, writing and speaking for Cuba’s independence. Marti, at 15 years old had started a newspaper called *La Patria Libre* (The Free Press). He was sentenced in 1868 to 6 months hard labor for his political leanings during an uprising by the patriots. In 1871, he was deported to Spain where he continued his education,

[11] Personal observations.

receiving his M. A., a degree in law, and had his political essays published. Moving first to France, then to Mexico, and later returning to Cuba in 1878, he was exiled again from Cuba to Spain in 1879. Again, he went to France and later to New York City. In 1881, he moved to Venezuela, publishing his *Venezuelan Review*. He irritated the dictator of Venezuela at that time, so was forced to move back to New York City. Marti was famous throughout Latin America due to his newspaper column in *La Nacion* of Buenos Aires. In 1892, he was elected as a delegate of the Partido Revolutionary Cubano or "Cuban Revolutionary Party." He helped draw up plans for an invasion and left New York City on January 31, 1895. The Cuban invasion began on April 13, 1895. Marti was wounded in battle at Dos Rios in Oriente province, where he died (Jose Marti, n.d.). "It is a sin not to do what one is capable of doing." This quote by Jose Marti, taken from a poster in the Sephardic synagogue, represents the Jewish philosophy that streams through the veins of Cuban Jews, and perhaps through Jews everywhere.

The Jewish Collective

The Jews of Cuba represent a "Joseph's Coat," pieced together in colors of tragedy, abandonment, and resilience. As history records, their group dwindled from over 20,000 in 1959, to about 400 in the 1990s. But that group of 400 has clung together, schooling their few offspring, taking care of their elderly, and seeing that their needs were meet even on the scanty stipend ($20.00 a month) doled out by the Castro government. They say that their religious needs are fulfilled by their leaders who have studied the Torah and could read Hebrew. Collectively, they stated, "We do not need a rabbi. We can care for ourselves." The ethnic Jews have assimilated into other communities as a means of survival. This paradigm was practical and made sense, because the scattered are less identifiable than if they were in a group. Yet they have remained Jewish, following the traditions. According to those who were interviewed, there

has been no anti-Semitism in Cuba. This is because all Cubans have been in "survival" mode, which in turn proved to be the commonality, or the binding thread between all Cubans, Jews and non-Jews alike, during "the Special Period[12]."[13]

Today, if there is a separation between Jewish groups, it could be located in the older Jews. They have been the skeleton community keeping the Laws strong during the worst of times. One respondent stated,

> Because of the determination and strength of the elderly, young Jews now have a religious base in which to return. And returning they are. They want to learn Hebrew; they are proud of their heritage. We have 100 youth who come to study at El Patronato every afternoon after school.

Today there are about 1500 Jews who go to synagogue, although the Orthodox count the number of Jews as 900. The difference in the number is because the Orthodox do not count those who have assimilated.

The old saying is that only two things can be counted on in life, birth and death. For the Jews of Cuba, death has been the one thing, no matter how scattered they have been, that has kept them connected since the Revolution. As Ruth Behar stated, "Jews want to be buried under The Star of David" (2007a, p. 41). On every trip to Havana in search of Jews in Cuba, everyone, even non-Jews, immediately ask, "Have you been to the cemeteries?" Jews also mention the monuments to Holocaust survivors located in the cemeteries. "We never forget the past," they say. The reflection of this memory is, in reality, not that long ago in their past. In the cemeteries, my regret was that I could not read Hebrew. I found two large monuments to those who died and also monuments to the Holocaust survivors in both cemeteries. The survivors who

[12] The "Special Period" began in 1989 and lasted through mid-to-late 1990s. It was due to the collapse of financial support from the Soviet Union.
[13] Personal conversations and observations.

came to Cuba to live out the rest of their days rest beneath the Star of David in those cemeteries. They are together.

Separation of Cuban Jewish Groups

Jews who had migrated to Cuba before 1898 were already gathered into their community groups. Immigration picked up, however, after the 1898 Spanish-American War during the first years of independence. The first of those, according to Bejarano, were Romanian-born Floridian Jews who had supported Cuban independence. These Florida Jews were "naturalized" Americans who had assimilated into the American social strata. These Jews decided to move to Cuba because of Cuban economic growth where opportunities for businesses were welcomed. For those wishing to relocate, a society, United Hebrew Congregation, in America was formed to provide burial ground in Guanabacoa for Jews immigrating to Cuba (see Appendix C for a history of Guanabacoa). The process began in 1906 and was inaugurated in 1910 (Bejarano, 1991, p. 119).[14]

It appears that a distinct separation of Jewish groups began during the time period around 1906. Robert Levine wrote that an Algerian Jew named Hadida, "established a burial society . . . At first, it was linked to the new United Hebrew Congregation, but the American Reform Jews and the Mediterranean Jews rejected each other's religious practices" (1993, p. 21). In 1911, six Sephardic immigrants, according to Levine, because they were "rejected from the hotel where the Americans were holding their services…formed their own synagogue…known as Congregation Israelita Chevet Ahim" (1993. p. 21) which is 972 kilometers from Havana. The hotel that Levine mentioned was located in Havana and was where religious services were held

[14] Bejarano cited this from Joshua Hochstein, "20 Years in Jewish Havana," *Havaner Lebn*, Jan 4 and 18, 1935 (Yiddish); David Blis, "Memories of Jewish Life in Havana," *Memories of Jewish Life in Havana," Havaner Lebn*, November 22 and 29, 1935 (Yiddish); United Hebrew Congregation Temple Beth Israel, *Golden Anniversary 1906 – 1956* (Havana, 1956) pp. 4-10.

during the "High Holy Days." "Confronted with poor Sephardic immigrants from the Ottoman Empire, the American Jews were compelled to grant them burial space, but refused to accept the Sephardim into their congregation" (Bejarano, 1991, p. 119).[15] Their traditions were somewhat different, using lamb instead of chicken, the affluent speaking French, and sending their children to schools run by "Alliance Francaise . . . and Alliance Israelite Universelle, modeled on the French association" (Levine, 1993, p. 22).

At the height of Sephardic immigration in 1921, a drop in sugar prices forced new arrivals to leave their small businesses to "become peddlers" (Levine, 1993, p. 22). "Hundreds of destitute immigrants from Eastern Europe appeared on the streets of Havana, and their number grew constantly" (Bajarano, 1991, p. 119). Although the American Jewish group (about 100) "saved them from starvation," there were distinct differences (Bajarano, 1991, p. 119). Out of these difficulties with differences came a new Reform Temple, Beth Israel, which was Orthodox. (Bajarano, 1991, p. 119).

The East European Ashkenazi, according to Levine, ". . . had come to Cuba intending to leave for the United States as soon as possible and many did leave before 1924" (Levine, 1993, p. 20). However, the United States blocked their migration with the 1924 Immigration and Naturalization Act which was ". . . a stronger version of the restrictive 1921 National Origin Act." The Yiddish phrase, "'. . . make their America in Cuba' became the theme for those stuck in Cuba" (Levine, 1993, p. 20). The separation between the Sephardic Jews and the Ashkenazi, according to Levine, was very obvious in that the Ashkenazim from Eastern Europe found the Sephardic from the Ottoman Empire to be "unsophisticated or suspect" and were "clannish" (Levine, 1993, p. 23). This was true, of course, but the Ashkenazi had more single men than the

[15] Bejarano cited this from George Weinberger, "the Jews in Cuba," *The American Hebrew*, February 8, 1918; Boris Sapir, *The Jewish Community of Cuba* (New York, 1948), pp. 14-15.

Sephardim who tended to settle with family groups. Thus, the single Ashkenazi men were more noticeable (Levine, 1993, p. 24). Many of the younger men who were from the Ashkenazi faction of Jews, especially those who were more isolated from the rest, tended to be socialists and atheists. Their social consciousness took on a more secular than religious stance. They were ethnic Jews, not religious Jews. The first Ashkenazi synagogue, Adas Israel, opened in 1925. Levine writes, "Even the president of the Orthodox synagogue kept his store open on Saturday…Virtually the only place they (Ashkenazi and Sephardic) mixed was at the market" (1993, pp. 23-24).

There was some Zionist activity, but the English-speaking community tended to remain neutral, not wishing to be associated to Jewish issues. The American Jews looked down on both the Ashkenazi and the Sephardic Jews. There was hostility about marrying outside one's group, so there was a tendency to keep separate through isolation (Levine, 1993, p. 24). Bejarano wrote that refugees from Germany and Austria who came to Cuba because of the 1921 U.S. Quota Act, found a

> mutual language with the upper middle class American Jews who represented both their affluent past. . . . With the decline of its philanthropic requirements, the United Hebrew Congregation remained a small upper class group, living socially apart from the rest of the Jewish population. (1991, p. 120)

In 1919, there were only 2,000 Jews in Cuba, as many had come and left. After World War I, and after the Russian Revolution, according to Levine, ". . . there was no longer an easy entry into the United States, so Jews settled in Brazil and Argentina . . . they came to Cuba in 1919" (Levine, 1993, p. 30). Networking was very important to the Jews from the Old World. Those who wanted to immigrate to Cuba "usually a young male," contacted family or an acquaintance who processed the legal paperwork required for entry. It was very difficult, as far as monetary funding was concerned because up front it cost $100.00 for sea passage and then

when arriving in Cuba, more funds were required. An immigrant had to have at least $10.00 when they landed. Also, kosher meals were very hard to get on ships, and some observant Jews ate only bread plus whatever food they could bring on board (Levine, 1993, p. 25). Young women had it much worse because they could not travel alone lest they have their reputations ruined (Levine, 1993. p. 25). Most young women moved in with their Ashkenazi family, but there was a residence in which 40 to 50 young women immigrants could live. Levine also stated, "Cuba and its lush topicality were strange to the newcomers but not unfriendly . . . Cubans were accepting and compassionate, and the immigrants never forgot …" (1993, p. 32).

Although the economy was terrible and most of the immigrant males had to work as street peddlers, as many as 4,000 Jews came in a new wave from Eastern Europe between 1925 and 1935. In this diaspora not only males came, but women and children as well. Politics were their main reasons, but Cuban Jewish mothers had begun to send for brides for their sons due to the fact that the males were going out with native Cuban women. Levine also wrote that the Sephardic immigrants' language was more similar to the Cuban Spanish, which added to their comfort, than the Ashkenazi from Eastern Europe. The climate paid a large role in culture adjustment for the Sephardic Jews whose homeland was much like that of Cuba. The Jewish population reached to about 13,000 in the 1930s. There was animosity from the general Cuban population toward these new Jewish arrivals because there was fear of lack of patriotism (Levine, 1993, p. 36). "Speaking Ladino (Judeo-Spanish), they had no difficulty in assimilating into the language of the country" (Bejarano, 1991, p. 120). The first organization of the Union Hebrea Chevet Ahim for the Sephardic Jews was in 1914. The Sephardic community needed religious and social attention, although the American Jews furnished the burial grounds. (Bejarano, 1991) According to Bejarano,

> Two important factors determined the development of the Sephardic community of Cuba; the homogenous composition of its members and the presence of spiritual-religious leadership.[16] The most important religious leader, Rabbi Gershon Maya, was a descendant of an old rabbinical family from Silivri, the community of origin of many of Havana's Sephardim. Rabbi Maya's devotion to Jewish education as well as to the Zionist movement found expression in the Teodoro Herzl day school that served both the Sephardi community and the Zionist Organization…Sephardi Jews were among the founders of the Union Sionista—Cuba's Zionist Organization, and for several years they continued to collaborate with Ashkenazi Jews on behalf of the Zionist cause, although they were gradually pushed away by the Yiddish speaking majority. This coincided with a growing economic gap between the two sectors: while Askenazi peddlers or workers were turning into merchants and industrialists and moving into better areas of residence, many Sephardim continued to peddle on Havana's streets. (1991, p. 121)

Levine stated, however, that the "writers and intellectuals" associated with the Grupo Minorista (1924) sided with Jose Marti's "vision of a racially and ethnically united independent nation" (1993, p. 47). Cuban writer Fernando Ortiz, "proposed a model of Cuban society as a clearinghouse or melting pot, praising the contributions of all of the components of Cuban culture and criticizing the use of ethnic and racial slurs, including the terms "judiada" for Jews" (Levine, 1993, p. 47).

Levine continued, ". . . unrest fed the discontent . . . of the 1920s," as a new generation of young Cubans "born under the republic" began to emerge onto the political scene (1993, p. 48). In 1925, the Cuban Communist party was founded and many in the party were Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants. They had brought with them from Eastern Europe their socialist ideals, many belonging to the Jewish Social Democratic party (Levine, 1993, p. 48). Gerardo Machado ran for a successful "manipulated" presidential term, considering this a mandate to rule by martial law. He disbanded the Cuban Congress. Levine wrote that "not all Machado-era legislation hurt. The 1927 Custom Tariff Act aided newly created industries by granting government protection" (1993, p. 48). This allowed hundreds of small businesses (many of whom were

[16] Bejarano cited this from M. Bejarno, "Los sefaradim, pioneros de la inmigracion judia a Cuba." *Rumbos,* 14, (October 1985): 107–122.

Jewish) to enlarge their output and to manufacture goods such as shoes, clothing, jewelry, and many other essentials that previously had to be brought in to Cuba. Now, Jews were hiring islanders. (Levine, 1993, p. 48).

Although the Tariff Act was successful, Machado made many enemies along the way. He did not hesitate to assassinate political opposition. He banned peddlers which affected many Jewish citizens. Levine stated that Machado could not control the economic downturn and one-quarter of 1 million salaried workers lost their jobs as exports plummeted. When over 300,000 lost their jobs, a strike "paralyzed the island" (1993, p. 48). Machado took care of this by having his "porristas" (members of a government death squad) burn fields, ruin crops, and kill. In 1930, the University of Havana, which was founded in 1728 by Dominicans, was shut down (Thomas, 1971). Also, another upset was that the United States passed the Hawley-Smoot Tariff Act which raised the tariff on Cuban sugar cane imports (Levine, 1993, p. 49).

Unrest and anxiety existed in Cuba during Machado's 8-year dictatorship. In 1933, there was a 5-month revolution during which the United States sent Benjamin Sumner Welles to help "ease" Machado out of office. Although not all Cubans trusted Welles, the Cuban armed forces did not back Machado. "On August 12, 1933, he flew to exile in the Bahamas" (Levine, 1993, p. 53). Welles approved Carlos Manuel de Cespedes to head a provisional government; however, he proved to be weak. Sergeant Fulgencio Batista y Zalvidar, a Cespedes "collaborator," became prominent during this period due to a protest against "deteriorating conditions within the army." According to Levine, Batista "remained in the wings." Welles warned Franklin D. Roosevelt that "radicals" had taken "control of the Cuban army and the government" and that the new leaders were "frankly communist" (Levine, 1993, p. 54). Provisional president, Ramon Grau San Martin, promoted Batista to colonel. Welles told Batista, ". . . that he (Batista) was the only

individual in Cuba today who represented authority" (Levine, 1993, p. 55). Martial law remained in effect in Cuba from 1930 to 1934. A law enacted on November 8, 1933, called the Cubanization Law (commonly called The Law of the 50 Percent) required that half of the workers in every firm had to be Cuban-born (later it included naturalized citizens). "Jews," Levine wrote, saw this law, "not as anti-Semitic" (1993, p. 56). Cuba's 1933 revolution pressured the United States to end the Platt Amendment in 1934, ending its "formal protectorate over the island" (Levine, 1993, p. 58).

The United States approved of Batista because he "had restored stability" to the military. There was a continuum of mistrust among the Jewry of Cuba of elected politicians stating, ". . . We knew that most elections were a farce. People were paid for their votes. And nothing would change, no matter who won" (Levine, 1993, p. 61). Batista, against workers' strikes in 1935, "was never comfortable" with that position, so in 1937, he sided with Communist party leader Blas Roca, working out a 3-year plan to bring sugar and tobacco exports "under state control" (Levine, 1993, p. 62). After Pearl Harbor, ". . . he found himself in the advantageous position of being a loyal friend of the Allies at a time when other Latin American leaders were often suspected of being pro-Nazi" (Levine, 1993, p. 62). During this time,

> Skin color determined to a large degree one's social as well as economic status: blacks and mulattos stood at the bottom of the ladder, in both rural and urban Cuba. This prejudice may have been one unstated reason why Jewish immigrants were able to succeed in as few years as they did. (Levine, 1993, p. 63)

The Sephardic colony "remained more placid, although . . . Moreno Habif . . . took steps to organize an umbrella agency . . . dedicated to aiding the sick and providing other forms of philanthropy, including free health care for the indigent" (Levine, 1993, p. 64). In Cuba, according to Levine, a large number supported the Spanish, although quite a few supported Mussolini, Hitler, and Francisco Franco. This caused anti-Semitism to spring up through

German and Falangist propaganda channels. A few Jews had become involved with the entertainment industry including the "white slave trade" involving prostitutes (some being Polish Jews). Many of these women had been "trapped by the Russian and Polish Pale" (Levine, 1993, p. 66). This revelation brought out publically the issue of Jewish morals. Patriotism of Jews was then questioned. Therefore, the question of accepting refugees from the Nazis was raised. To "cloak" this negative, anti-Jewish move, it was simply stated that Jews would displace Cubans from jobs. During this time of great anxiety that permeated the Jewish community, the two groups, the Sephardic and the Ashkenazi, still remained separate (Levine, 1993, p. 66).

Nazi Activities and Cuba's Jews

The new German flag with the black swastika was displayed in Cuba, not only "in the German offices and businesses, but by sympathizers," in 1933. Generalísimo Franco who was a Spanish fascist, offered no assistance to refugees from Germany. In Cuba, radio attacks against Jews called them "human garbage." (Levine, 1993, p. 79) Complaints to Batista were ignored, although he promised to do something about the harassment. The US tried to get Cuba involved in the resettlement plans, opening a Havana office in 1937. By mid-1938, 5,000 refugees had taken refuge in Havana, doubling by 1939. Again, the cloak of "refugees take our jobs" was broadcast and appropriated by the labor unions. Levine stated,

> . . . two streams of Jewish refugees from fascism arrived in Cuba. The first peaked in 1938-1939, then slowed when the Cuban government refused to any longer honor landing permits. . . . Visas could be obtained, but it was done with bribes and payments through a chain of command that ended at the presidential palace or the army high command . . . Everything revolved around whom you knew . . ." (1993, p. 94)

On May 27, 1939, the luxury liner SS St. Louis arrived in Havana from Hamburg with 930 Jews and 7 other passengers. Cuba's government changed rules governing visas 1 week before the ship sailed because Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi propaganda minister, had spread the word that

those on board the SS St. Louis were criminals. This propaganda led Cuba to not honor any visas from the SS St. Louis. One man, Max Loewe (a lawyer from Breslau who had been released from Dachau providing he leave Germany), slashed his wrists and jumped overboard. He was rescued and taken to the Calixto Garcia hospital. He was the only passenger from the St. Louis to reach Cuba alive, besides the 22 who, as the story goes, were saved by Meyer Lansky. It was never documented, but it was during the time when Lansky was spending time at his casinos. He allegedly paid the bribes that changed the 22 refugee passenger's visas from "provisional" to "legal" visas so they could get off of the SS St. Louis and stay in Cuba (Levine, 1993).

Lansky and Cuba

Meyer Lansky was a Polish-born American Jew. In Poland, his family experienced German pogroms. His father emigrated first, coming to New York City in 1909. The rest of the family joined him in 1911. Lansky's teen years found him in the company of bootlegger Bugsy Siegel. It is said that Lansky helped Lucky Luciano rise to power by planning the murder of Salvatore Manranzano in 1931. This connection with Luciano led to Lansky's development of a gambling empire reaching from New York to Cuba. Although he was in the Jewish Mafia, he was influential and respected in the Italian Mafia, as well. At one time, he was considered the most powerful man in the underworld (Meyer Lansky, n.d.). However, Lansky's dream of a gambling empire in Cuba almost came to an end when Luciano was sent to prison in 1936, on the charge of compulsory prostitution. Luciano received a sentence of 30 to 50 years. With Luciano in jail, Lansky kept a low profile, but continued the businesses he shared with Luciano. Lansky knew he needed Lucky because he was a Jew operating in an Italian world and needed the continued approval of the "Commission" (English, 2007, p. 20).

In late 1937, Lansky "was summoned to the Caribbean by Batista" (English, 2007, p. 20). Batista, who knew mobster Lou Smith (who was a friend of Lansky), asked for help to pep up gambling operations in Cuba. Lansky was the chosen one to do the job. He began by importing "dealers, croupiers, pit bosses, and floor managers (those he could trust)" to the Cuba operations in 1938, 1939, and 1941. He gave a promotional gift to Batista, "The Golden Ticket" which was a complimentary "key to the casino." This was possibly the first time that Lansky saw all of the possibilities for a powerful gambling industry in Cuba. Although Lansky was now operating in Havana, ". . . it was not at the level he had once anticipated." He needed financial backing and approval from the "Commission" (English, 2007, p. 20).

Lansky's lucky break came in April, 1942, when Luciano's attorney, Moses Polakoff, recommended him for a "startling proposition." U.S. Navy intelligence needed help from the Mafia in keeping their "eyes on the water-front" due to the leakage of locations of US ships. Lansky met with naval intelligence; the assistant D.A., Murray Gurfein; and Moses Polakoff. Lansky told them that they could count on him because he felt Luciano would go along with the plan. According to T.J. English, this began one of the "most unorthodox alliances in the history of the American underworld" as the mob was to watch for Nazi activities in the harbors of the north east. Luciano was released from prison, but sent back to Italy. Lansky "smoothed the savage beast" (Luciano was irate because he was being deported) by uttering the magic word. Cuba" (English, 2007, p. 26).

In December of 1946, a conference was to be held in Havana at the Hotel Nacional, with about 2 dozen underworld figures to map out a plan for Cuba's Mafia operation. One who was to attend was Vito Genovese, a long-time friend of Luciano. Genovese was, as English put it, a "mindless killer" and had killed for Luciano. The meeting almost did not happen because 450

hotel employees went on strike. However, the President of Cuba, Ramon San Martin, demanded a settlement between workers and hotel management. The strikers got their demands met and the Mob meeting was back on (English, 2007, p. 26). Gangsters "came from far and wide." Moe Dalitz, a Jewish mobster and partner of Lansky, came.

> A fleet of fifty cars with chauffeurs was at the ready. Dancers and showgirls from the city's three main nightclubs--the Tropicana, the Montmartre, and the Sans Souci--were selected and paid for their services, as were prostitutes from Casa Marina, the classiest and most renowned bordello in the city. (English, 2007, p. 33)

In other words, the mobsters were entertained royally, as Lansky had planned. Lansky presented his idea to turn "the entire Caribbean into the center of the greatest gambling operation the world had ever seen" (English, 2007, p.33). Due to the success of Lansky's Mob Conference in Havana, he was now in a sitting position to run all Cuba's Mafia activities.

The Beginning of Castro's Cuba

"Havana . . . was a fashion sensation and a feast for the eyes. . . . Places here . . . are painted in vivid colors and lit up so that the color blares like a trumpet . . ." (Levine, 1993, p. 204). Continuing, Levine stated that Cuban Jews used their white skin color to their advantage. The American Jews lived extremely well. "Visitors compared parties given by members of high society . . . to those of Aristotle Onassis . . . Mink, chinchilla, sable, and ermine furs were popular…in 1946" (Levine, 1993, p. 205). This was post-war prosperity. Levine also stated,

> Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, Cuba's Jews, riding the crest of the economic boom, on the whole continued to live in their own world . . . Cubans generally referred to them as hebreos (Hebrews), not the more colloquial (and impolite) judios . . . Sephardic Jews called East European polacos, and were in turn called turcos . . . Poorer Jews were peddlers and house-to house-salesmen in Old Havana, living in sub-standard housing . . . as Ashkenazics and Sephardics continued their "separate communal profiles. (Levine, 1993, pp. 217-218)

Although some anti-Semitic prejudices resurfaced, Fulgencio Batista and Havana's mayor, both Cuban Communist Party members, lent their support to the Jews. Batista returned

to power in 1952, which ended the "democratic system" and martial law was instituted (Levine, 1993). Batista had personally "intervened to rescue seven Jewish refugees in February 1939 and had won the lasting gratitude of Cuban Jews" (Levine, 1993, p. 223). Levine wrote that it was understood by everyone, Jews and all, that after Batista took power, "graft had risen to new extremes" in 1952 (1993, p. 231). Levine also stated that, "Jews had a feeling of security in Cuba . . . a part of the mosaic of the Cuban population" (1993, p. 232).

Margalit Bejarano wrote

> The sympathetic attitude towards the Jewish people, especially among liberal and left-wing intellectuals and politicians, found its expression in the friendly relations that had developed between Cuba and the State of Israel during the democratic presidency of Carlos Prio Socarras (1948–58).[17] It should be stressed that the great economic progress made by local Jews throughout the above period, accompanied by expressions of *nouvelle richesse,* was accepted with great tolerance by the Cuban society. This does not imply that social prejudices towards Jews were non-existent, but they were mostly limited to the higher social strata who were reluctant to accept Jews to prestigious clubs or social circles. Among the low bourgeoisie and poorer classes, who were destined to carry on their shoulders the burden of the Castro Revolution, anti-Semitism was a rare phenomenon. (Bejarano, 1991, p. 118)[18]

By the late 1950s, "[t]he American Jews mixed increasingly with other groups . . . socially and in business, but religiously they still stood apart" (Levine, 1993, p. 233). However, the Revolution in 1959 changed Cuba and Beth Israel's last rabbi asked his Sabbath congregation to respond to the needy and

> those left destitute in the wake of warlike destruction. . . . The shock of political reality suddenly assaulted Cuba's Jews. It is probable that few members of the temple congregation imagined what the impact of the 1959 Revolution would be . . .. (1993, p. 234)

[17] Bejarano cited this reference from Abraham J. Dubleman, "Cuba." *American Jewish Year Book,* LI (1950), pp. 260–264. "President Batista Lauds Cuba's Immigrants for Three Decades of Contribution," *Rescue* (Winter 1952), p. 15.

[18] Bejarano cited this reference from her interviews: Jose Lurie, Miami, 1984; Aron Yuken, Miami, 1987; Israel Luski, Miami, 1984; Bernado Benes, Miami, 1987; Max Lesnick, Miami, 1984.

Fidel Castro took power in Havana in July, 1959. "To these Cubans, historically excluded from the system with no hope of betterment, the Revolution promised hope and nationalistic self-pride in exchange for isolation and economic malaise" (Levine, 1993, p. 235).

Castro, in one of his many very long speeches, delivered these words about the results of the revolution, at Cospedes Park in Santiago de Cuba, saying,

> . . . The Republic was not freed in 1895 and the dream was frustrated at the last minute. The Revolution did not take place in 1933 and was frustrated by its enemies. However, this time the Revolution is backed by the mass of the people, and has all the revolutionaries behind it. It also has those who are honorable among the military. It is so vast and so uncontainable in its strength that this time its triumph is assured. We can say—and it is with joy that we do so—that in the four centuries since our country was founded, this will be the first time that we are entirely free and that the work of the first settlers will have been completed . . .. (Castro, 1959, p. 26)

At that time there were about 11,000 to 14,000 Jews in Cuba, and approximately 6,000,000 Cubans. About one-fourth of the Jews were Sephardic, but the majority of Jews were Ashkenazi. Almost all of the Jewish population in Cuba lived in Havana, and most were not Marxist-Leninist, but considered themselves socialists (Levine, 1993). Levine continued,

> Following Lenin's thesis about the existence of two cultures within a class society—the culture of the exploiters and the culture of the exploited—the revolutionary regime accepted the support of those willing to renounce the island's decades-old system of blending free enterprise with paternalism. The period from 1934 to 1958, during which Cuba's Jewish immigrants embraced Cuba as their permanent homeland, was labeled the "neocolonial" era by revolutionary revisionists, those who had prospered during these years were called lackeys of international capitalists. (Levine, 1993, p. 241)

The United States, after Castro's anti-US speech in 1961, broke off all diplomatic relations with Cuba. Washington, after the Bay of Pigs, imposed an embargo on all Cuban trade. "No one knew how far the Revolution would actually go . . . a few managed to have some belongings shipped . . .. Departing Jews expressed bitterness at having to leave their homes, cars, furniture, and businesses" (Levine, 1993, p. 242). A Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society representative wrote

> It is disastrous—the rich have been left, some having foreseen the situation. But these are few . . . All assets have been taken over by the government, the militia, or other bandits who have simply taken over everything which our brothers have left behind after having worked for many years, sacrificing themselves to make their way . . . Those who remain can do nothing, business is dying for lack of merchandise, and the large industries, as well as the small ones, are being nationalized. Owners are being watched strictly. (Levine, 1993, p. 243)

As far as the Castro regime and the church went, according to Levine, this issue reached its peak during the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. "Three hundred Catholic priests were deported to Spain from Cuba . . ." (Levine, 1993, p. 249). No Bibles were published after 1959. "The regime treated the Jews who remained in Cuba with solicitude . . ." (Levine, 1993, p. 250). State censorship of religious services extended to religious publications and radio broadcasts, although weekly half-hour radio talks in Yiddish were permitted" (Levine, 1993, p. 251). However, Castro was said to have bent over backwards not to persecute Jews during this time of antireligious activity. All five synagogues continued to function, although most of the membership went into exile. Even the cemeteries were cared for by the state. "The government furnished two buses to transport Jewish children to the school from distant locations," but this ended in 1975, "due to lack of interest, according to the State" (Levine, 1993, p. 252). In 1990, only 305 Jewish families remained in Cuba, and "most with non-Jewish spouses" (Levine, 1993, p. 278). Despite smallness in numbers, the Jews of Cuba clung together as did their ancestors from as far back as 597 BCE, culturally producing "memory traces" of their archaic heritage; as Sigmund Freud recalled, " . . . strange secret longings—perhaps from the legacy of my forebears, for the Orient and the Mediterranean" (Bergstein, 2010, p. 36).

To understand the Jews of Cuba, one must reach even father back into the past than simply to study their arrival in Cuba. As Freud writes concerning culture,

> When one has lived for long within a particular culture and has often striven to discover its origins and the path of its development, one feels for once the temptation to turn one's

> attention in the other direction and to ask what further fate awaits this culture and what transformations it is destined to undergo. (Freud, 1928, p. 7)

Freud continued with,

> . . . [O]ne soon finds . . . the value of such an enquiry . . . the present must have become the past before one can win from it points of vantage. . . . It is remarkable that little as men are able to exist in isolation they should yet feel as a heavy the sacrifices that culture expects of them in order that a communal existence may be possible. (Freud, 1928, p. 8)

For the Jews, their roots were founded with their rebellions against persecution which brought about their movements beginning before the Roman/Jewish Wars. This was followed by diaspora taking place through the Middle Ages, the destruction of the Jewish Quarter in Palestine all the way through the decades up to the point of the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, ending with the Shoah (see Appendix D for a detailed account of the early history of the Jewish Diaspora).

CHAPTER IV

NARRATIVES AND CEMETERIES

As I replayed all of the emotions that I felt as I scrolled through the many photographs, tangible memories of my trip to Cuba, I was left with one lesson that will be my closest memory and that is that the Jews of Cuba share deep connections with their ancestors, their heritage of the lands of Judah. This did not come to me with the conversations over lunch at the Patronato with the JDC (Jewish Distribution Committee) friends, or at the cemetery tour, nor during the rituals of the Friday night Sabbath service at the synagogue. I realized that to understand the real-life experiences of young and old alike, one must observe their everyday life—as they were living it—in order to get the full understanding of the Cuban Jew. It was how an outsider within must connect, rather than just read about their lives. I discovered this as I watched the young Jewish Cubans (the 20-/30-year-olds) going through workout routines at the Patronato Synagogue Community Center to the latest music of the current generation. These young Jews were the MTV crowd, very "hip and with it." The only things left behind in their world are the old cars, the old buildings, and the lack of merchandise. Otherwise, they are not as people 50 years behind the times, but very modern in thought and actions. As I watched, I could see that they were a tight-knit group, community spirit prevailing, assisting each other if needed on one of their exercise machines. They wore the latest gear and kept up with their fast-paced instructor. The Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean may have cut off the Cuban Jewish Community from their relatives and friends in the United States, and kept them in their 1950s cars, or limited their

internet sources, but they certainly were[19] not cut off from living their lives to the fullest. It was obvious; not only are they cared about by their leaders but they care about being a part of their community; certainly a Marti influence.

Personal Stories

I interviewed four English-speaking Cuban Jews, giving each the same sheet of questions. My instructions were for them to answer only what they felt comfortable with and explained that my research was for the purpose of writing about the Jewish lived experience in Cuba. I also explained that this work would result in a dissertation as a part of my Interdisciplinary Ph.D. Program at The University of Alabama. I spoke with many individuals, gathered bits and pieces of rich narrative descriptions, and best of all, made many Jewish friends. What impressed me was that every person I spoke with was interested in the fact that I was in school and working for a degree. They all seemed to believe in education and were very proud that their school children studied Hebrew and Jewish Law after a long school day. The following are the transcripts of interviews of the four English-speaking persons who gave permission to be interviewed, in their own words as much as possible. They answered the questions asked of each, expounding in detail when the question was open-ended.[20]

Respondent A

> My grandparents were from Poland, from Warsaw. My father's side and from my mother's side, from Lublin. My father arrived in Cuba in 1928, from Warsaw, and my mother's side, she was the last one saving her life from the Holocaust. In my father's side, a sister arrived in the '30s. Two of her brothers had immigrated to the USA in the '20s. She was the last one, saving her life from the Holocaust. They were all originally from Poland.
> My father left Poland running away from the Military Service and because of the hard economic situation, and my mother because of anti-Semitism. I lost in the Holocaust my grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, so my parents avoided talking about the Holocaust.

[19] Change of tense because this is from a journal entry.
[20] The questions for the respondents are located in Appendix A.

Respondent A, who worked in the Sephardic synagogue (although an Ashkenazi Jew), pointed me to the poster and the section that read,

> . . . what the generation of Cuban Hebrews (Jews) wanted to remember, the generation before them tried to forget. In order to rebuild a living community [after the revolution] they would need help. . . . Numerous foreign organizations offered assistance and support, and individual synagogues provided support as well as non-institutional solidarity groups . . . Jews, non-Jews, and Cuban Jews living elsewhere—all stepped in to help rebuild Jewish life in Cuba as you see it today (quoted from *We Remember: The Holocaust and the Creation of a Living Community*).

Continuing, respondent A recalled,

> First my father worked as a shoemaker, in different small shoe factories in Havana, but when my mother arrived in Cuba, he was working in a small shoe factory in a city named San Antonio de los Banos, where the owners were my mother's sister and husband. So they met there, fell in love, and married in a few months in the year 1936. I was born in August the next year.

After 3 years of visiting with respondent A, we had become friends, so he broke from his stream of consciousness and smilingly said, "Dorothy, you and I are the same age. We are twins." He gave me a hug and I told him that I had found my long-lost brother.

> My parents, who were both from Poland, had an elementary education and my father studied in a Yeshiva in Warsaw. I am an electrical engineer. Before the Triumph of the Revolution, I started to work with the Jewish Sephardic Company; they owned several business stores and a perfume factory in a farm out of Havana. There I worked as a guide and seller of their products. So I started working in capitalism (5 years) and for the Government, in total for 55 years until I got my pension in the year 2005, and since then I have been working under contract at the synagogue since March 2012.[21]

When I mentioned discrimination, he replied, "No never. This country always has been very safe for anyone; Discrimination, no." Regarding how Jewish history is taught in schools, the respondent replied,

> No. The Holocaust is explained, but not the Jewish experience in Cuba. During the Inquisition years near 1500 in Spain, Jewish Religion was prohibited and many Jews converted to Catholicism, or had to escape or maintain the Jewish Religion in "Secret." Here, about Batista, were Revolutionaries against Batista, but The Triumph of the

[21] I met Respondent A on my first trip to the Sephardic synagogue in May 2012.

> Revolution, since the first years after intervention of the American companies and big business, a lot of rich families emigrated (Jews and non-Jews). Of course nobody agrees to lose a property. But we held together because nobody was against us. There was no discrimination, or racism, nor anti-Semitism and we felt safe and secure here; no reason to run away. We are held together because nobody is against us. We are united. We celebrate all festivities and work together, Jew and non-Jew. My experience as Jew in Cuba has been that we have had freedom and safety. Nothing has been against the Jewish Religion, nor any other one. We work, study, and try to improve our work and life to have a better future. Our wish for our children is that they study and finish University studies to have a better future as professionals and workers and continue their Jewish traditions.
>
> Although there is no Rabbi to serve the synagogues, one comes however, however, about once a year from either Spain or the Dominican Republic. I think it was in 2013—a rabbi performed 19 weddings at one time; such a huge celebration we had afterwards.
>
> His bright blue eyes sparkled as he recalled the great wedding festival for the 19 couples.

Respondent A needed to attend to other business at the synagogue and we agreed to meet the next day. For the Jews of Cuba, the marriage of 19 couples was a sign that their community was growing. Some of the spouses were assimilated from another religion, but they had been through the process of becoming members of the Jewish faith. With more marriages, more children will be born, and they all understand that the future of the Jewry in Cuba lies with births.

Respondent B

There was a difference from A due to gender; A, being male and B, female. Also A worked at the Sephardic synagogue (although an Ashkenazi), whereas B worked at the Ashkenazi synagogue, holding a high position under the President Dwoin. Respondent B said,

> I recall when about 90% out of 15,000 Jews left Cuba leaving only about 1,500. My mother's family went through relocation in Nazi Germany ending up in the Warsaw Ghetto. I lost my grandparents in the ghetto. My mother, who was 8 years old at that time, along with her brother, escaped. They made it to Russia where we had family. In about 1920 sometime, my mother and uncle came to Cuba.
>
> My father was from Poland. He came to Cuba in 1927, where he met and married my mother. Long before that, my father's family relocated with the Jewish Diaspora from Eastern Europe to Cuba. My father, mother, grandfather, uncle, cousins, and other family members are buried in the United Hebrew Congregation, Centro Macabed of Cuba.

Continuing, she said,

> A hurricane did so much damage to our synagogue that it was almost unusable for some time. But in the 1980s, because of the Diaspora of Jews out of Cuba to the United States (and other places), there just was no money to fix it and repair it for use. The building was so damaged that it deteriorated more and more.

She showed me pictures which lined the halls of the building. We walked outside to a side-adjoining structure which once belonged to the Patronado. She kept talking, telling about the nationalization of a part of the building saying that the government bought part of the building which now houses the Community Theater.[22]

As Respondent B and I walked to the library, she showed me a picture of Stephen Spielberg with the President of the Ashkenazi synagogue. She said Spielberg had visited and helped with funds, along with many others.

> Our synagogue is now renovated, and today houses a library with over 10,000 books in Spanish, Hebrew, English, and other languages. One hundred children from grades K though 12 gather to study Jewish Law in Hebrew on Sunday. Regular Sabbath services start on Friday evening, continuing through Saturday.
>
> We have a recreation center with machines and a teacher for our young working people and we have another room where our senior citizens come to read poetry, sing, study, have conversations about politics, and in general, they socialize. We also have our seniors work on sewing projects. They sell these items and make money for our synagogue. Not only do we have a lunchroom where we have lunch and special occasion banquets and parties, we also feed our seniors and any guests who come. Anyone, really, is welcomed to eat with us. We are very proud of our pharmacy which is opened to the public once a week. We fill prescriptions with the drugs that we can get. We don't charge. However, antibiotics are difficult to obtain and so are asthma medications. This is because it is very difficult to due to the lack of supply coming into our country. Asthma is so bad because we have such high pollution because of the old cars with exhaust and many other pollutants in Havana.
>
> Our kosher butcher shop opens once a week, or whenever they can get meat, and the cost is not prohibitive. It is about the same price as the other stores. Guests who come bring

[22] On each of my four visits, I went to see a play at this community theatre. As far as I could tell, no Jews took part in any of the plays, however, I stood on the huge Star of David that is embedded in the floor to the entrance of the theater. Each play was very avant-garde, edgy. Even though the plays were in Spanish, I got the message. In the last play I attended (this year), which was *Romeon and Juliet,* Juliet sang "Crazy."

> supplies for our pharmacy. This is appreciated. We have more aspirin than we need, but we keep them because we appreciate any gifts of medication. Our group tries to help the community as much as possible.

Continuing to showcase the Patronado, Respondent B said,

> Most of us live in the Vedado[23] area. Many Jews lived before the Revolution in the Miramar[24] area. That is the wealthier area of Havana. Today, it is too expensive. Mostly ambassadors from foreign countries live there. Most of us live now in apartments in the area near the synagogue. We send our children to public school, and then bring them to the Patronato for Jewish studies. We send our high school students to Israel for study in the summer. We get donations for this from the Dominican Republic, from the United States, and some from Spain. We sent 16 students to Israel for 1 month last summer.

Walking through the building with Respondent B., she stopped to show a bronze bust of Jose Marti, making a special effort to point him out. Along the walls are photographs of famous people such as Stephen Spielberg. There is a letter from him to the president of the Patronato. "This is a photograph of his visit."

Passing a glass case filled with items to purchase, Respondent B. stopped to open the locked back sliding panel and took out hand-sewn goods. "We sell what our senior citizens make. This helps provide for our community and it also keeps our seniors productive in their old age. They look forward to the social life at the Patranato."

> "We have learned to make-do with what we have and this has, I believe, made us come together and this is good. In the old days, the Sephardic and the Ashkenazi did not mix so well. But now it different, we stand as one group politically. There is no discrimination. I do not ever remember any discrimination in Cuba because you were a Jew. We feel free to be Jewish and celebrate Sabbath in our own tradition. When the rabbi comes once a year, we now have many Jews who come back and they have spouses who are not Jewish, so they must go through the process and study Jewish Law. Then the rabbi accepts them even if they were not born Jewish. We are growing in numbers again. This is important. When Cuba was nationalized, our synagogue could not afford our very

[23] I visited the Vedado area so many times that after my first trip to Havana, I could catch a public bus and go to the vicinity and feel at ease walking around. On my first trip, I was more timid about public transportation. But I found it to be easy to get around the city on buses.

[24] I visited the Miramar area which still has the mansions, but they house the ambassadors from foreign countries now instead of wealthy Jews. All have tall wire fences painted green around the structure for safety and are guarded by uniformed guards.

large building, so the government bought the property and it is now a community theater."[25]

Respondent C

Respondent C was the youngest person interviewed, in his early 40s. Another difference between him and the other respondents was that he works for the government in the area of cultural affairs. Very fluent in English, he spoke clearly and with ease. He and I spent several days visiting when he had time. As money is very scarce in Cuba, I treated Respondent C to several meals, which he appreciated. He had no car, so I also paid for the taxi that took us to recommended restaurants. He said Americans are overweight because we do not walk.

He began just as the others:

> I was born in Havana, in the community of la Plada. I am almost 45 years old. My mother and my father are educators. My mom is retired now and my father, who was also a teacher, retired 10 years ago. Now he works with an Italian firm as a manager for this year. I attended school–actually since my mom was working in education, we have day-care centers for mothers. I attended day-care from 1 year old until I was old enough to attend kindergarten at the same day-care. I did not attend the University of Havana because they did not have education studies there but I attended another school in Havana. I got my B.A., and there my major was education. The University of Havana does not have a degree in education, at least not when I was attending. They may have one now, I am not sure.
>
> My post-graduate courses were in International Studies and I have a degree that is almost like a Master's, but not a Master's. So, it is not considered a Master's, but almost. In Cuba, education is completely free. You don't have to pay a dime in Cuba. From day-care to Ph.D. The government has made mistakes in education, but the way that has been managed before, they are amending their mistakes. I mean, there was a moment in Cuba [when there were] too many professionals that the most technical and professional now they are amending their mistakes. We had too many professionals. It was a risk but now they change that policy. This type of technical studies that are very much needed because of the economy of the country right now. We are needing agricultural engineering and people that can work more or less--that is work in the production. And that is something that is being enforced and emphasized during this last few years and that is what I am happy for. I am not really concerned for, actually I am pleased about. We just had too many professions and we were lacking in technical skills–not enough technical and

[25] I attended plays, one on each visit to Cuba. The theater was once, before nationalization, the "community building" attached to the Ashkenazi synagogue. Today it functions as a community theater building.

practical skills. They are having a rescue because of poor economy. We needed people with technical skills and agricultural engineers, and people to labor, skilled labor.

My grandfather, who is dead now and buried in the Sephardic cemetery in Guanabacoa, was a factory worker in the cigar factory. His family came from Turkey and they were oppressed and poor. But they could understand the Spanish language in Cuba. He soon got a job and married my mother who was not Jewish. I am part Jewish, but I do not practice Jewish Law. My grandfather was very devout and so his wife followed the Law although she was not Jewish. They bought from the kosher butcher shop when they could. I have been to the Sabbath with them on occasion, but I did not follow them in that way. My mother was from Dominican Republic, so I am dark. I have cousins who are very light. My color did not keep me from synagogue because there are many colors who are Jewish in Cuba. I just did not go.

In Cuba, diversity is not a hindrance. Jewish history is not taught exactly, but the Holocaust is written in our textbooks. We study that part of Jewish history. Actually the textbooks are a more or less like companion. Or more like a collection by outstanding educators in that particular field, like the Holocaust, like we have been talking about. For instance, the books of chemistry, for instance, are selected by chemistry teachers, or the chemistry board in methodology for chemistry teachers. It can be the national methodologists that made the selection of the most classical, or updated information to make our textbooks come from behind. They use updated information. Our textbooks are free, but we do recycle our books. Students are responsible to take good care of their books because they are going to be used by people coming after you to study the same matter. This is not a hindrance in the university for teachers of history because the diversity we have is, see, we have diversity but at the same time we have no such diversity because we are all mixed. We are all mingled—we are together—we are Cubans. That is not diversity in this case, I mean, we are diverse because we are different kind of personalities—because different kind and we have enough kind of teachers of history. For every teacher, we have to take care of the difference that each student may have about the way he assimilates knowledge. And the way you learn so you can differentiate what is the treatment that you are going to have for the children who are going to grab the knowledge properly. So it is not a hindrance in the end. It is something every teacher should focus on and actually one of the emphasis that all methodology takes up. And the Jewish children learn Hebrew and Jewish studies at their synagogue, just like other children learn different studies in their homes, or other locations, but not in public school.

I remember when I was in the school studying education, in the pedagogical class, one of the first things my teacher told me that you cannot repeat the same class over and over again because the people who are attending the same class are not the same and the same person that you see today won't be the same person tomorrow because you have to take into account all the social environment that that person lives in/that the person is in or the pressure is in the moment in the year because there is some moment that . . . a math for ninth grader for instance, the math can be like a very intense subject so when you are going to teach some humanities, for instance, you have to take into consideration which

of the part of the year of the syllabus of the rest of the science studies that can be hindrance to your student, so he cannot be stressed out for all of this. Knowledge assimilation, so that is something we call, hygiene of the learning process.

Well, of course, since we are very little we are known nationally as diverse people. We are Spanish, we have African inheritance, Chinese inheritance, European inheritance, and Jewish inheritance, but they are a small group just like the Chinese. We have also native Cuban Indian inheritance because when Columbus arrived to [*sic*] Cuba they are a big population—they are a part of our own inheritance. So all of this becomes our diversity and this, this melting pot is part of our richness—our nationality at the end. So, yes, the history books include all of that. But religious studies, you get somewhere else.

Our school children basically, all children wake around 7:00 in the morning and they watch cartoons, have breakfast, they put their uniforms on—that is, all elementary and secondary students. They use uniforms in Cuba. They pack their pack their backpacks with all their books and all their snacks for school. At school they must start at 8:00 and finish at 4:20. They have lunch also, and every student must take P.E. It doesn't matter if he or she, they all have PE together. They play together and they have arts together. They have more or less, this class in Espanola called—it teaches them practical things, like how to sew a button to a shirt, to mail write and letters, to create something with your hands, gardening also, and cooking. All boys and girls take these classes. This is taught to elementary and secondary education students. Actually, Cuban students have like 10 months of school that starts in September and stops in July. You have 2 months of vacation in the middle you have 2 weeks in-between, like holidays.

Back to the regular school day, when day is over, when you finish, go home and they do homework, have a snack, then go play till 7:30; soccer, baseball, games, then come inside and take bath and have dinner, watch TV before they prepare for going to bed. I am not a teacher in the educational system, but my impression is that Cuban students are like most all students everywhere, some want to learn more than others, some cannot apply themselves, and some excel. I think Jewish children are the same. We have such a small group left of Jews in Cuba that they are very close, those who practice the traditions. I go to the Sephardic cemetery on occasion to help clean the graves off. The weeds and grass grow quickly here because of the climate. It is sad to see my grandfather's grave if it is not clean. I polish his "Star." That is my personal Jewish tradition. I wash my hands when I leave the cemetery, but all visitors do that.

Respondent D

Very graciously agreeing to answer questions for an interview, Respondent D's request was that he wanted to answer by writing Spanish, stating that he could answer questions in Spanish fluently. If he had to answer in English, it would take more time than he could spare because of prior commitments. Of course, this was no problem because of translators at The

University of Alabama in the Modern Languages and Classics department. However, we had a lengthy conversation about the Ashkenazi synagogue which was where he worked and held a position of authority. Following are the answers to the interview questions.

Respondent D's interview was different from the others in that he emailed the answers to me in Spanish and I had them transcribed. Holding a high position in the Ashkenazi synagogue, he wanted to be very careful with his answers and said that he felt more comfortable writing in Spanish. Of course, that was certainly alright with me, so we agreed that we would correspond, which we did. That is the reason for a more personal account of his interview.

His answers as transcribed are,

> My grandfather came (originating from Turkey) and had been born in the city of Istanbul and arrived in Cuba in the year 1913. My grandmother's parents were born in Turkey, but in 1898 left for Germany and there was born my grandmother, all coming to Cuba around the year 1915. In Cuba my grandparents got to know each other and married; formed a home with 6 children. The occupation of my grandfather was as a traveling salesman, the same as almost all the Sephardic Jews that were established in Cuba, my grandmother worked in the home doing domestic labor.
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> My parents were born in Cuba and married here. My father was a soldier and studied Law at the University of Havana. I was born in 1961 in Havana, Cuba and married here. I studied for a degree in History at the University of Havana and my educational experience had been as a professor of History and also as a professor at the School of the Hebrew Community of Cuba. No Jewish Cuban has been separated from the rest of the Cuban population or from any specific sector as a result of our Hebrew traditions. That had not been necessary because we always enjoyed the respect of the Cuban population.
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> Sadly, in the Cuban public schools, no subjects related to Judaism are imparted. Education in Cuba is secular and the national educational program doesn't incorporate any subjects related to religion. Hence, the majority of Cubans may have a large lack of knowledge about religions and especially of the Jewish religion. In Cuba it is not, nor has it been necessary to hide the Jewish status, for the simple reason that there has never been anti-Semitism, nor has a synagogue been burned nor has any Hebrew person suffered persecutions, beatings, or assassination as a result of their Jewish status.
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> The period subsequent to 1959 was difficult enough and not only for the Jews but also for people of all religions resulting from the Cuban constitution that declared Cuba as an "Atheist" republic. All the religions suffered some type of discrimination and the religious status of someone was not openly divulged because it could cause someone

harm in places of study or work. But the Jewish traditions, the religion and the faith in the future, they permitted the survival of a small group of Jewish Cubans and in 1992 began a resurgence of the Hebrew Community of Cuba.

The life of a Jewish Cuban is characterized by working communally, that is to say a Cuban has many activities in the synagogue, and depending on their age, is integrated into a group determined by their age range. Daily there are activities, courses, Sunday school with instruction for 180 people, in addition to Jewish folkloric dances and other activities, including the celebration of Shabbat and all the festivities of the Hebrew calendar.

The Jewish Cuban population is estimated at 1,500 people, of whom approximately 1,000 live in Havana, where there are three synagogues. Also there exists a synagogue in the province of Santiago de Cuba and another in Camaguey. The young people develop a lot of activities, they participate in the Taglit programs and the March for Life. The Hebrew Community of Cuba is sustained financially thanks to the donations of the various organizations and people mainly from the United States and Canada and especially from JOINT (JDC).

Narrative From a Published Source

Ruth Behar, a native of Cuba who became a citizen of the United States, has taught cultural anthropology at Princeton University, Wesleyan University, and currently is teaching at the University of Michigan. She is my primary resource concerning the lived experiences of today's Cuban Jews. Her interest in Cuba's Jews and her own heritage was at first simply to re-visit a fragmented past. But the more visits to Cuba she made, the more dedicated she became toward the collecting of oral histories before they disappeared or were lost and forgotten. The outcome of Behar's focus became volumes of work: books, articles, classrooms, and speeches. This scholarly work, not only on her past, but on all of Cuba's Jews, has made her a leading authority on this subject, resulting in a researcher's gold mine of information on a detached society. Behar's mission continues today. For a selection from a published source, I selected from Behar's book *An Island Called Home,* one particular respondent's narrative whom Behar[26]

[26] Author of *An Island Called Home: Returning to Jewish Cuba.*

interviewed. It was interesting to me because of the name Behar of both respondent and author. It is summarized below.

> Rebecca Botton Behar (no kin) said in 1993 about living in Santiago de Cuba where the Revolution began describes what life was like at that time. She was Sephardic, her father's family from Turkey. "The synagogue was shut down; she had nowhere else to go to pray . . . They had no choice but to allow religion back into Cuba. All those years we've believed that Fidel Castro and the government could resolve all of our problems. But Castro isn't god. That was our big mistake, to think that any human being, no matter how charismatic, could be like God." To that quote, Ruth Behar adds that Rebecca Behar helped get the synagogue in Santiago reopened, but later left to live in Miami. Recalling her life before leaving Cuba, she prayed to God in a Catholic shrine.
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> Up until 1959, there had been eight synagogues in Cuba. Most of the Jewish Cubans who had assimilated into the island's population were ". . . professionals, merchants, shopkeepers, and peddlers who lost their livelihoods when businesses and properties were expropriated after the revolution . . .." (Behar, 2007b, p. 2)

Unpublished Recorded Narratives Transcribed by the Author

I was extremely excited at finding what I considered a valuable collection of recorded oral history when I toured the Hebrew Sephardic Center of Cuba in Vedado, Cuba. It was there I discovered the following narratives recorded at their Holocaust Memorial. These unpublished historic stories had been gathered and saved by the Center, not only for historic purposes. When I inquired about them, I was presented with two DVDs for use in my research. I carefully wrapped the discs and hand-carried them in my purse from Havana to Tuscaloosa. At the Samford Media Center in Gorgas Library at The University of Alabama, I transcribed these stories from a broken English into the narratives that follow. As I transcribed, I noted connections even though from different countries and with different languages. The basic themes were root origin, education, jobs, and memories[27]. The stories are arranged accordingly.

[27] In accordance with the policy of the University of Alabama's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (see Appendix E), I did not use the given names of the narrators, but created pseudonyms for each, their protection and privacy vital; therefore, Jewish names were assigned to each individual.

Regarding Education

Avi, whose family was from Poland, was the only narrator to mention that he studied at the American School, Elizabeth Walkman, an Evangelical school in Cienfuegos. This was interesting because he told that eight Jewish families lived in Cienfuegos and all of their children attended this school because the Jews did not want to send their children to a Catholic school. The Walkman school allowed, at Jewish parent's request, Jewish children study from the Old Testament during the time the others were studying catechism. Avi's memory was that all of his family in Poland died in the crematoria.

Avi's translated narrative.

> My family is from Poland. My mother is from Bialystok. My father from a town, he said it wasn't even in the map; very little. They were very poor. My mother's wasn't, but my father's family was very humble and they worked in sawmills. In 1935, both came to Cuba separately. They met here in Cuba in 1939. They married and had me and my brother. My mother came to Cuba and one of her sisters went to Argentina. A brother had come to Cuba before her. There was no more family left, the rest died in the crematoria. Five of my father's brothers were saved. First, my father came and then, two uncles. Two sisters went to America. My grandparents could get to Russia during the war, as I heard from my family's stories. My father was always a trader. After he had the shoe factory in Rodas, he went to Cienfuegos. There, my brother and I studied in the American School Elizabeth Walkman. There were eight Jewish families in Cienfuegos. All the Jewish children attended the same school. It was an Evangelist school. The only one there was, and of course, the Jews didn't want to send their children to nuns or priests' schools, the Catholic schools. They would rather send their children to the Evangelist one. But they got to an agreement with the school board and they asked the principal that when the students were in catechism, could we go to the library to receive the Old Testament instead. This was what we had in the tests.

Alon's story focused more on politics than any of the other narrators. He described his Polish father, persecuted by the police, becoming a Young Communist. He was able to escape on a German ship headed for America, but "fell in love with Cuba" when the ship stopped there. That was in 1924. Alon's mother, who was originally from Poland, fell in love with the revolutionary. He described his father as not being in romantic love with the wife and they

divorced. His father worked with the Worker's Club in Havana, as an important revolutionary. Alon described that job situation in Cuba as difficult. It was hard to get established even he once had been very established in Poland. Alon's memory was that one of his uncles left his family to get work in Cuba. He could not get them out of Poland in time and they Germans burned them in their house.

Alon's translated narrative.

> Originally my parents hailed from Poland. Jews from different parts in Poland. My mother was born in a city called Minsk-Maszowieck. My father, on the contrary, came from a very poor family. He became a Young Communist. He was persecuted by the police. The oldest brother was invited by an uncle. I do not know if he was from Canada or the USA. He was invited to go to America, and his brother knowing that he had been persecuted gave him a ticket to go. He went to America in a German ship. When he got to Cuba he fell in love with Cuba and he remained here. My father came in 1924 and years later, my mother who knew about his work in Cuba fell in love with the revolutionary; a romantic love her husband did not share, of course! He expelled her from the house. My mother and father soon got married.
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> Before the divorce she had supported the Cuban revolutionaries many times, mainly the communists, but also the ones belonging to the Workers' Club in Havana. My father developed a very important revolutionary job there. People from the working class met there to sing and keep their identities. Or to perform theater plays and so on but they also had the objective of making life easier for the people who had to cope with a new language, to learn Spanish. On my mother's side she was the first to come to Cuba. Her husband had helped her to bring the brothers. All of them came through Cuba. Some stayed in Cuba. One went to Argentina, one to Mexico, and three to America. The last brother to arrive was the oldest. The working class had a hard time getting out. He had already been established in Poland. He was married and had three children. He also came to Cuba to bring the family he had left behind. They could not get out in time because the German occupation had taken place. The Germans locked them in their house and burnt it.

Regarding the Holocaust

Diana, Amos, Ariel, Adam, and Ben all related dealing with the Holocaust. Diana (origin Poland) stated that she had no family left on both sides. She told of her mother's escape to Siberia to give birth to her sister and afterwards was sent to the Warsaw ghetto. The United States would not accept war-time immigrants, so they managed to get to Cuba.

Amos's origin was Sephardic from Istanbul and that area. The educational background of his father was medicine which he was studying in Paris. There he met his wife and they moved to Barcelona, but got caught in the Spanish Civil War, so moved back to Paris. They left for Cuba on a ship filled with Jews immigrating out of Europe, arriving in 1938, staying at the Luz Hotel. Six years later, his father became the insurance agent of the American Insurance Company. Amos' memory of family was of his aunt's husband being caught by the SS and offered a last wish.

Adam (origin Poland) told of his parent's immigration to Cuba at different dates: 1928 and 1936. Stressing the terrible economic situation in Poland, and also compulsory military service, he joined his mother's brothers who were already in Cuba. Then his mother came, met his father, and they married. Adam's memory is of his grandparents, cousins, and the remaining family, all who died in Warsaw.

Ariel (origin Poland) told that his mother was from Pinsk and his father from Stablisk. They met in Havana. His father was trained as a tailor and shoemaker, but worked in Cuba repairing railways. He saved enough money to bring his brothers and sisters to Cuba. He died suddenly in 1940 before he could bring his parents to Cuba. Ariel's memory was that because his father died, his grandparents were executed in the forest or either in the gas chamber.

Ben (origin Russia/ Poland) told that his mother immigrated in 1924 to Cuba and his father in 1923, where they met. They were very poor, but his father became an ice-cream vendor. Many of Ben's father's relatives perished in the Holocaust. One letter that was remembered was from a sister, Shifre, which reads, "Dear and beloved brothers and sisters . . . I am writing to you because I want to say good-bye. Because our lives are a matter of day by day

. . . a matter of weeks . . . and only a miracle could save us. Unfortunately, we are living times in which miracles do not come true. . . . "

Diana's translated narrative.

My parents were Polish; they are both dead. My sister was Russian. That is, I was the first Cuban in the family. My parents immigrated in 1948, after the war. They did it because they had no family left from any of the sides, only my father's father and two of his sisters who had lived in America since 1922. The idea was to immigrate there, but as they were war immigrants; they were not allowed to enter the USA. My mother was pregnant with me and my grandfather suggested that they come to Cuba so my mother could give birth. He made use of the trip to see my father he had not seen since 1922 and it was 1948. That was what they did and my parents stayed in Cuba. Well, how they managed to survive, I don't know. And I don't think they knew, either. My mother was with my sister for a long time. My sister was born in 1942, in the middle of the war. My mother had to escape to give birth to my sister who was born in Siberia, Russia. After that, she was in the Warsaw ghetto and so was my father. He was taken to Auschwitz, from where he managed to escape. He told us very little about it and my mother told us even less. My grandfather helped my father to make . . . my father was already very tired. He suffered from bronchial asthma because of the war, and so on. He didn't want to go to start again in another place. My father had five siblings. My grandfather took two of the youngest sisters to the United States. There were three left, two of them, a boy and a girl, died. My mother had 7, 6 of them died. Grandparents . . . I didn't meet any uncles, aunts, or cousins. It is sad.

Amos' translated narrative.

Well, from my father's side, they were Sephardic Jews coming from Kir…(unintelligible) and from my mother's side they were also Sephardic coming from Istanbul and went to Paris. The ones that came to Cuba were my parents in 1926, during President Machado's government. My father was studying medicine and for obvious reasons the university was closed so he had to continue his medical studies in France. There he met my mother's brother, Richard, who was his best friend and who introduced my mother to him. My mother's name was Rivka and her nickname was Becky. They fell in love and got married. They went to Belgium for their honeymoon. And from there back to France. They decided to immigrate to Barcelona. Once there they were caught in the middle of the Spanish Civil War, so they decided to go back to Paris. It was almost at the beginning of WWII. My father suggested my mother coming to Cuba. He told her it would be safer for them as they had a toddler, that he was sorry she had to leave her parents, her brothers, but the three of them would be much safer. We immigrated in a ship that was full of Jewish immigrants who left Marseilles bound for Cuba. We arrived in Cuba in 1938. The three of us arrived at the Luz hotel. At first we lived in a room in the roof. As the economic situation improved we went down to the other floors. Six years later or so my father, who had begun as an insurance agent, became the president of the American Insurance Company in the whole Cuban island. Life for my mother was

very hard. There were seven siblings; two were married and my uncle Richard had to go to the war as a soldier with the French troops. My uncle Eli also went to the war. He was killed but we never knew how or where. My aunt Esther was married and she had various children. Her husband was caught and when they were about to kill him, he was asked if he had a last wish, he told them he wanted to see his family. It was a big mistake because they went in cars to take all the family except one child who happened to be with my grandfather. He was coming to the house with the youngest boy and my grandfather told him not to speak. To wait till everything was over. When they got to the house all of the family was gone. All of them died in the crematoria.

Adam's translated narrative.

Both my parents were born in Poland and they migrated to Cuba on different dates. My father came in 1928 and my mother in 1936. They met here in Cuba. In my father's case, the economic situation was very bad and there was compulsory military service. Trying to run away from this situation, he tried to immigrate and off he went to Cuba. As the situation in Europe was a bit difficult, he had two brothers who had gone to Cuba before. In my mother's case, it was in 1936 when she came here because of the economic situation and the discrimination that had occurred. On my father's side, two brothers remained there. We never knew anything about them nor about my grandparents' cousins—all of them died in Warsaw. Only one of my mother's brothers who had gone to Canada and a sister who had come to Cuba survived. She came to a town called San Antonio da los Banos where my uncle and my aunt lived. She met my father there.

Ariel's translated narrative.

My mother was from Pinsk, close to Minsk, the capital of Belorussia. My father was from a little Polish town, Stablisk. They didn't meet in Poland or in Belorussia, but in Havana. Since he came to Cuba, my father started to work. Although he was a tailor and shoemaker, he didn't work much time as such because I think he began working precisely in the outskirts of the town where he established himself, as a trader repairing the railways, where I suppose his salary was much more than a shoemaker or tailor. He saved money and then, little by little, he started to prosper. First he had a table in a small ware store and then a one-door store, and later, a bigger one. This allowed him, though he had done it since he had been working repairing the railways, to little by little, pull the strength to bring the family. He brought six brothers and six sisters. After they arrived in Cuba, he tried to help them to be settled as traders. Almost all the years not to say that in the first years, he brought them one by one, brothers and sisters. Only his parents and the two youngest sisters stayed there. But life seems to have no plots and when he believed he could bring his parents and sisters, he died suddenly . . . in 1940. That is to say, the Germans had already invaded Poland. I don't know if all this had been illusory, because between the Nazi invasion and my father's death, there were only a few months in between and probably they were executed in the forest or died in the gas chambers of a concentration camp.

Ben's translated narrative.

> My father was from a little town called Ivye that belongs to Russia today and my mother from little Polish town called Radzilow. My mother came in 1924 and my father in 1923, separately. They hadn't met . . . absolutely not! They had the hard time immigrants are used to having, poor as they were. My father worked in many jobs to earn his living. Even in . . . it is very weird, one of the things he worked in, was as an ice cream vendor. Somehow, all my father's relatives perished there in the Holocaust, except one of my father's nephews who became a guerrilla fighter and saved his life. In my mother's case, was victim. . . . Well . . . they were saved . . . to tell it exactly [segments of tape unintelligible]. One sister immigrated to Cuba, my aunt Aida, who lived with us and died here in Cuba. She married a Sephardic Jew, a worker. Another sister, who came in the '30s, I suppose in 1935 or so, immigrated to Israel. My father told me that one of his sisters, Shifre, had written a diary. The date is back to October 12, 1942.
>
> "Dear and beloved brothers and sisters: Rachel (who is the one in the States), Berl (who was there, too), and Arie (my father). I am writing you (Excuse my translation) . . . because I want to say good bye. Because our lives are a matter of day by day, a matter of weeks, and only a miracle could save us. Unfortunately, we are living times in which miracles do not come true . . .."

Regarding Arrival and Detention

The connection between the following narrators is the fact that they all mention detainment. Using the word, "Triscornia," both Amos and Elaina described it as like an "Ellis Island." It was a camp for immigrants in which they stayed from a few days to several *weeks*, until discharged. The reason for detainment was due to Visa paperwork. Asher's family were there three weeks and Elaina's family stayed for three days, as well as Asher's family.

Elaina told of going to school for one year and when she knew how to speak Spanish, she quit and went to work in the diamond factories. Asher narrated that his family was from Rumania where his parents were married under the Jewish religion. He worked as a shoe-maker's apprentice, but he suffered from poor eyesight, so learned to make mirrors for the Jewish community. Aryeh's family left Belgium because they had no hope, but were happy in Cuba. Amos told that there was no anti-Semitism in Cuba when he arrived in 1941.

Elaina's transcribed narrative.

The trip took 21 days from Lisbon to Havana. Almost everybody was seasick anyhow. On the 21st day, we arrived in Cuba and it was a happy day although it was really hot. We got off the ship and they took us into what they called Trisconia. It was like Ellis Island in the United States. They kept us for 3 days till we were told if we give some money they would let us out. And that is exactly what happened. We went to the hotel. Father paid for at least a month or more and he said at least we are set for a little while, at least we won't starve. And of course, we didn't have any more money left, and we were not allowed to work, not allowed to take a job, but father managed to go and help people sell stuff and he got a little commission from the jewelers and so to get by for the next few months. After that, he opened . . . he found a little spot like a hole in a hallway. He fixed it up and he started repairing watches. I went to school and once more started to learn a new language. I went to school for about a year and once I knew Spanish, I quit that school because some diamond factories had opened up. We had a lot of Belgium and Dutch people, refugees, and they opened up diamond factories in Havana. We were still trying to get to America. When we arrived in Cuba, in 1941, my mother didn't even want to unpack. She said we will only be here a few weeks, because everybody was getting their visa after 6 weeks and going to the States. We used to laugh about it, and she said we won't unpack because we leave in a few weeks it won't pay. Well, the few weeks turned into 5 years.

Aryeh's transcribed narrative.

We left, we had no hope. I had no idea how strong the United States was. I had no idea what Cuba was like. But the only thing I knew about Cuba was that it was far away from Europe. But I always felt we can never get that far; so I felt more safer [*sic*] in Cuba than to be in Spain. I was feeling, when I got to Cuba, better and I saw my brother waving at us. And it was like a welcome. And we felt very happy to arrive in Cuba. I hope one day I can get back to Cuba. And all of us, even today, in Cuba, they put us all together, the refugees. And we were together as one. And today, we still talk about Cuba; we don't even talk about Belgium because we were 11 years together in Havana.

Asher's transcribed narrative.

My family came from Rumania; my parents married under the Jewish religion. There, he had a little barber shop. He was good at his trade, but people did not pay for his services. He offered because they say he was a Jew. They discriminated against him. They were used to throwing stuff from the floor at him. When the soldiers were drunk, they entered the shop to break the chairs in the place. My father couldn't retaliate because the police gave him no support. Thus, he wrote to his brother and asked him to please take him out of that country. His brother gave him money and a visa; we left in a ship, four children and two grown-ups. My little sister was the youngest. She was 6 months old. I was 4 and a half, and the others were 3 and 2 and a half years old. We got to France and from there to Havana. We didn't have any documents to go to America, because there were no visas. It was 1931. We were in Triscornia for 3 weeks. The Jewish societies were

mobilized and they guaranteed us. Then the government guaranteed us the permission to stay in Cuba until papers were clear. As the papers never got clear, we stayed here for good. My father liked the weather and he opened a barber shop. We studied here in Acosta Street; I mean in Jesus Maria and Cuba Street, in a small room and we learned to speak Iddish. After that, when the school closed, we were sent to the Israeli Center in Cuba. We also studied Iddish and we finished grade 6 in that school. Then I began working as a shoemaker apprentice, but the job was not convenient for me, since I was suffering from the sight. I learned how to cut glass and how to make mirrors for the Jewish colony.

Amos's transcribed narrative.

In Havana, Cuba, by the way, and this has nothing to do with anti-Semitism, all of us with visas were taken to a, it was like Ellis Island, it was called Triscornia. And we stayed there for about 3 or 4 days before we were discharged and the day we were discharged from that camp, I noticed next to our name in Spanish, saying that they can be released if they have a visa for the Dominican Republic. But even the Cubans didn't realize that our visa for the Dominican Republic was no longer valid. I went to high school in Havana and I had no papers anymore from Germany and the strange part was that when I came to this country (US) to finish my high school the 3-1/2 years that I spent in Havana. We arrived on September 3rd, I believe, 1941, and December 14, the United States entered the war. At that moment, there were approximately 6,000 Jewish refugees in Cuba, approximately 1/3 of them from Germany. Batista passed a law allowing these 6,000 people to stay in Cuba for the duration of the war. So we were lucky and we stayed in Cuba till we got our immigration visa to the United States, which we received in late '44 or early 1945 and then in April we came to this country.

Regarding SS St. Louis

The two stories that follow are the only two to mention by name the SS St. Louis. Aharon (origin Turkey), remembered his grandmother crying, although at the time, he did not understand why. Later, he knew that one of his grandmother's sons was on the ship, but could not get off. Isaac (origin Germany) described his schooling and how he learned to speak Spanish very quickly. He told of seeing the boat which held his friend's parents and two sisters. He remembered his bus passing by and he knew he had cousins and close friends on the boat.

Aharon's transcribed narrative.

My grandmother from my mother's side was from Turkey. And she married my grandfather, also a Turk. In the meantime she had a sister who had also died. They decided to join the two families with the two little girls. But the two boys did not come.

One of them, Leon, came to Cuba some years later. During the war, I think. The other son, the one we want to talk about was my mother's brother, Alberto. I remember my grandmother crying for him, telling us she didn't know anything about what happened to him. Later on, I knew that Alberto had come in the Saint Louis. He was one of the Jews who came there in the ship, but could not disembark and had to return to Europe.

Isaac's transcribed narrative.

I just know we were going to Cuba, and the reason we went to Cuba is because we couldn't get . . . well, we had choices, China, Argentina, or some other countries. And luckily we had a chance to get into Cuba. When we arrived in Cuba, I think it was in December of '38. I was amazed. I was completely amazed like I said. What impressed was the neon lighting, the advertising, the moveable neon lighting signs they had in those days. There was nothing like that in Germany. We were in a detention camp for 2 or 3 weeks at least and why we were there I don't know, but it might have been to just clear papers; it might have been for financial reasons. I don't know, but I do remember that when immigration was open from Cuba and the United States, I remember my parents talking about it, where is number so and so, and if they get to that number luckily we can go. I learned Spanish pretty fast, fluently, but then I went to school in Cuba. I went to two different schools in Cuba. First, I went to school in Havana for about 5 or 6 months. There was another family, the Simon family, they lived a block from my house. Actually, there were four sisters and three of them are in the United States, who I am very close with. And two sisters and parents were in the boat, the Saint Louis, I am sure everybody realizes that the boat was there in Cuba, and I saw that boat when I went to school in Havana. The bus drove by there four times a day and I knew that some relation or not relation, distant cousins, or very close friends were on it, but very close were on it [*sic*].

Regarding the Diamond Industry

The diamond industry came with the Jews from Belgium to Cuba, creating many jobs which was a boost to Cuba's economy. The following narrators mentioned diamonds directly in their story: Esther, Bruriah, Sarah, Batya, Bayla, and Judah. According to Esther's remembrance, she stayed at the Hiass [Hyatt] Hotel, although she had no money. She described Cuba as "clean" with no one bothering you. She also stated that the people who came with money opened the diamond factory. She learned how to cut diamonds and went to work.

Buriah described Cuba as a time when Batista was president. She had all girls in her class and they were Jewish. All of the boys were non-Jewish. Her father was a diamond dealer.

Sarah's narrative told of coming to Cuba when she was 14 years old and she did not go to school. Her father became a diamond cutter and taught her how to cut. Her mother also became a diamond cutter. They made enough money to have everything they needed. Bayla mentioned "what a wonderful country Cuba was." Especially appealing was that there was plenty of food. She mentioned being an Inca Jew who brought the new industry, diamonds, to Cuba. They made a lot of money.

Batya was descriptive about her Cuban experiences. She did mention playing at the beach, of how she played hard. But she also mentioned working hard at diamond cutting.

Judaj's narrative described his experience entering Cuba on a ship (not the SS St. Louis), his escape, and how he found the synagogue to hide in. From there, the rabbi connected him with those who had escaped from Belgium and had brought the diamond industry to Cuba. There, he got a job.

Esther's transcribed narrative.

> When I came to Cuba I had nobody to send me the papers. You could also come to the United States, say, if you have a certain amount of money that you don't, that the government is not afraid that they have to take care of you. I had no money. I went to the Hiass, you know the Hiass [Hyatt Hotel], they help you. They gave amounts of money. We shared a room; paid for the room 60 dollars a month. It was a nice hotel and each paid 30 dollars. In Cuba there was no problem. Clean everything and nobody bothered you. You had people with a lot of money going to Cuba and people from Belgium came, like for instance, from Antwerp, and from Holland. People in the diamond line who opened factories there and you had the chance to learn how to cut the diamond, which I did, too. My uncle or my aunt sent me the papers from New York. They had also, in the time from 1935 to 1940 till they came to United States, I had nobody to write to get the papers. Then I got the papers and I came here.

Buriah's transcribed narrative.

> In Cuba, at that time, Batista was the president. It was a Jewish life in Cuba. In my class, all the girls in my class were Jewish, and all the boys were non-Jewish. I was in Cuba for 7 years. And just to show you what the mentality is after a while, one day I was home and the door rings and nobody was home, and it was a couple of policemen. My parents came home and I said the police came here. My father was dealing a little in

diamonds at the time. They gave me all the diamonds and I rushed over to some friend who lived in another part of the city and I thought I would be followed and I was so nervous. And the next morning the police come again. They were selling raffle tickets.

Sarah's transcribed narrative.

When I came to Cuba I was 14 and a half years old. I did not go to school anymore, because I said I am going to go to work, I am going to help my family. But we got to Cuba, my father came to Cuba; after a short while in a sanatorium there he was dismissed and he was fine. My father started working from home. He took in a machine, a diamond machine. He could work in his leisure. I learned how to cut diamonds and so did my mother. And we were diamond cutting. In fact, I have a picture to show you of us diamond cutting . . . and we lived there for 2 years and things were comfortable there. We had everything comfortable there; cash for school, .my father went to school which was most important to him, and we lived there until the war was over, and then we came to America.

Batya's transcribed narrative.

My father had two or three cousins in Cuba, so they got him an apartment. My father came here in 1944; I am not sure but I think I came here in 1945. Cuba was very nice in many ways because I had a lot of boyfriends, I went to the beach; I played, too. I didn't just work. I worked a lot, but I played a lot, too. I would get up and go to my work which was diamond cutting. I learned English in Cuba. There was a Jewish Organization called ORT and I would go there very frequently and I would take English classes. For a long time, for many, many months, I didn't know any Cubans to speak of, most of my friends were all refugees. Every one of them, really. We all knew that we wanted to come to America. That was going to be the goal. So it was again, an in-between stage. And after my parents left Cuba and I went back and lived by myself there because I hated to live here because it was so very difficult for my parents.

Bayla's transcribed narrative.

Fantastic. I couldn't believe what a wonderful country Cuba was. And we had a home there and food. And we tried again to come to United States but it was continued issues. I started babysitting for a Jewish family. In the meantime, the Antwerp Jews had collected the diamond industry in Cuba and we were allowed to work in the diamonds—that's the only work that was allowed because we Inca Jews a new industry I went to the diamond in the spring and I make quite a bit of money …I made a bit of money. It wasn't substantial, but very nice. Finally in 1945, after the war ended, went to the United States.

Judah's transcribed narrative.

We stopped over in Cuba for one night then I called up the embassy that I am a French prisoner, a lieutenant. He said he would come out and see what he could do; to do

something about it, I don't know what to do. So the deputy came out to the ship and they asked for permission from the ship to come and to take me down and then I went down to the embassy in Havana and then I went in there and on the left there was the bathroom and on the right side was the other door. The deputy says that I have to go peepee, you know, or go in there and remember when you come out, come out, go out to the other door. And over there was a window in the bathroom, and like in the kitchen here, jump down. So I jumped from there and then I asked in Havana, where is the Jewish church? She says, "dos blokes"; about two blocks from here. So I came over there quick, you know. And it was a little bit dark, you know, night, so I knock on the door. Guess what? The Rabbi opened the door. And I told him the story and he says come here, stay here overnight, don't go out. And then on the next day the ship went to Indochina. So I couldn't get out from Havana. So I was stationed in Havana. The rabbi gave me a job from the Jewish people who escaped from Belgium, the diamond makers.

Commonalities/ Differences

In the preceding recorded narratives, each story-teller had a connecting bond with the other. As immigrants, most mentioned one or more commonalities, whether it be their origins, arrival in Cuba, Holocaust memories, economic and job situations, education, or family life. Most, it seemed, had planned to continue on to the United States, but ended up staying for a long time, some never leaving. This was due to World War II and the non-immigration policies that were in place at that time. Their stories indicate how many different countries were represented, how many different languages were spoken, and the difficulty of adapting into a totally new climate and culture that needed to be overcome.

Their voices, however, despite all of their distinct differences, revealed the bond of an archaic heritage; a will to survive together. Therefore in their new country, they felt free to create new industries and build factories, which in turn, helped the island of Cuba to prosper. They felt mostly free from the anti-Semitism that was rampant in Europe and elsewhere. This immigrant Jewish community now felt safe. That evidence is located within each narrative, as some tell of hardship, while others speak of life as easier, especially those in the diamond industry. Immigrant narratives blend, cross borders, and show connections. They described

clearly their educational experiences (each different), job opportunities (also different), and the one thing they all had in common: their Judaic heritage.

Although the Jewish population in the 1980s dwindled to about 400, as has been stated, (shrinking from over 26,000) because of the nationalization of property during the Castro regime, today their community boasts of a growth to approximately 1,500. The question is, how and why did they remain faithful to their Judaic past, and how did they avoid total assimilation into Cuba's unique culture? The obvious reason, as Freud has suggested, is because of their "archaic heritage."

Jews and Death

As one looks closely at the existence of Jews in Cuba, the discovery of why they have survived as a community becomes clear. It is because they hold so strongly to their Jewish heritage. Traditions, such as following the laws of death are extremely important in the Hebrew faith, just as Ruth Behar suggested. Factual evidence is found in Guanabacoa (see Appendix C).

Guanabacoa, Cuba, lies about 24 minutes via the Autopista Nacional, or 5 kilometers to the southeast of Havana. Along the highway from Havana one will see many modes of transportation such as vintage autos (as well as a few new ones), wagons pulled by horses or mules, large Russian transport buses, and occasionally appearing in the distance, a train rumbles along. This tiny colonial township was established amongst rolling hills dotted with palm, banana, mango, and avocado trees, and other species of native flora that flourish in such a perfect tropical climate. It is a picturesque setting and is filled with as many stories as can be found most anywhere on the island.[28] Two large Jewish cemeteries are located there.

[28] Personal Observations of May 2012, '13, '14, & '15.

The town itself is situated in the province of La Havana, south of the city of Regla and it is unclear when the first Jews came to settle in Guanabacoa. However, it has been established that in the late 1920s, a Jewish businessman, Samuel Epstein, from New York City, established a fabric company, Sedanita. The company exported "underwear, shawls, and scarves" and employed 200 workers. It was sold to the Brandon family in the late 1930s. But earlier, Charles Shipiro bought the building from Epstein's renter, who expanded the underwear company for his knitting and dying company. In the 1940s, the Jewish community in Guanabacoa congregated in the Centro Israelita. Its businesses, as well as the Jewish community and the general population, declined after the 1950s, as Jews moved out of the area (Guanabacoa, n.d.).

Still in use today, however, and unique to Guanabacoa, are the two Jewish cemeteries: the United Hebrew Congregation (UHC), also called the Centro Macabeo Cemetery, and the Centro Hebro Sephardi. The Ashkenazi Jews are mostly from Eastern Europe. The Sephardic are mostly from Spain, Turkey, and Syria. All of the different Ashkenazi and all of the Sephardic groups spoke different languages, had different cultures, yet were bound by their Jewish heritage and laws. One of these identifying markers is the burial of their dead. As Ruth Behar wrote, "Jews want to be buried amid Stars of David" (2007a, p. 41). Therefore, the two groups founded cemeteries (with the aid from American Jews) so that their people could rest together under their cherished Stars of David. The two cemeteries, located distinctly apart, separated by distance and a train track, are also separated by lineage. [29]

The Ashkenazi cemetery (Figures 1-8) is framed by brick walls plastered with cream-colored stucco and covered with blindingly colorful magenta bougainvillea. The cemetery itself sits on the ground that was once the Finca el Aguacate, or Avocado Farm. There are 1,600

[29] Personal Observation in May 2012, '13, '14, & '15.

Figure 1. The gates of the Ashkenazi cemetery.

The Star of David rises above the black wrought-iron gates of the United Hebrew Congregation Centro Macabeo of Cuba, the Ashkenazi cemetery in Guanabacoa, Cuba. Numbers on either side of the gates read: 1906 and 1911 (magenta bougainvillea partially conceal the numbers).

Figure 2. The matsevot of Dr. Jose Miller.

Dr. Miller, who died in 2002, was President of the Ashkenazi Synagogue in Vedado, Cuba. The site is memorialized by bronze Menorah.

Figure 3. View of the Sephardic cemetery from hill in Ashkenazi cemetery.

At the crest of the hill in the Ashkenazi cemetery one can see in the distance, about a half of a mile away, the Sephardic cemetery. Stray flowers dot the landscape, decorating the gleaming white marble sarcophagi.

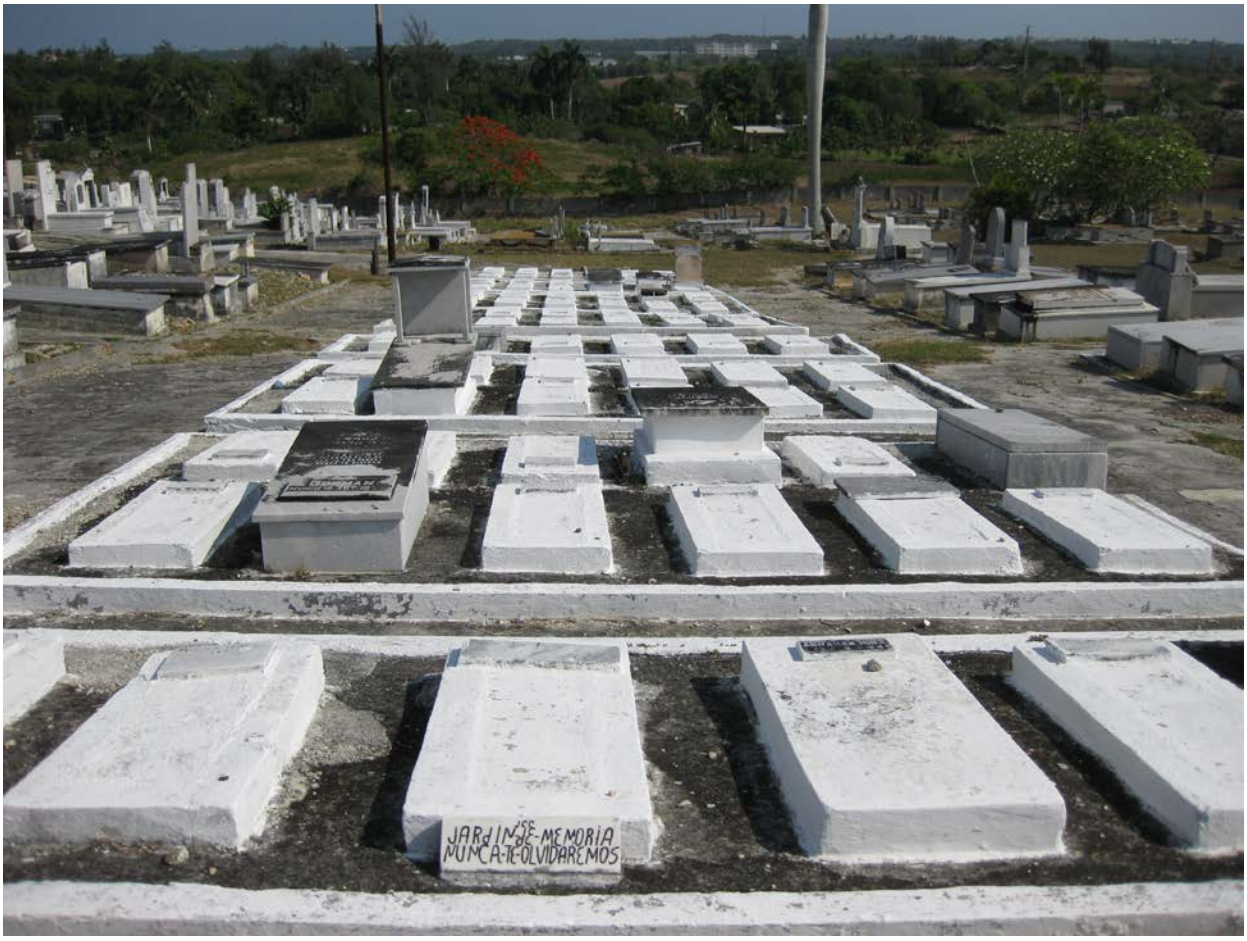


Figure 4. Children's graves.

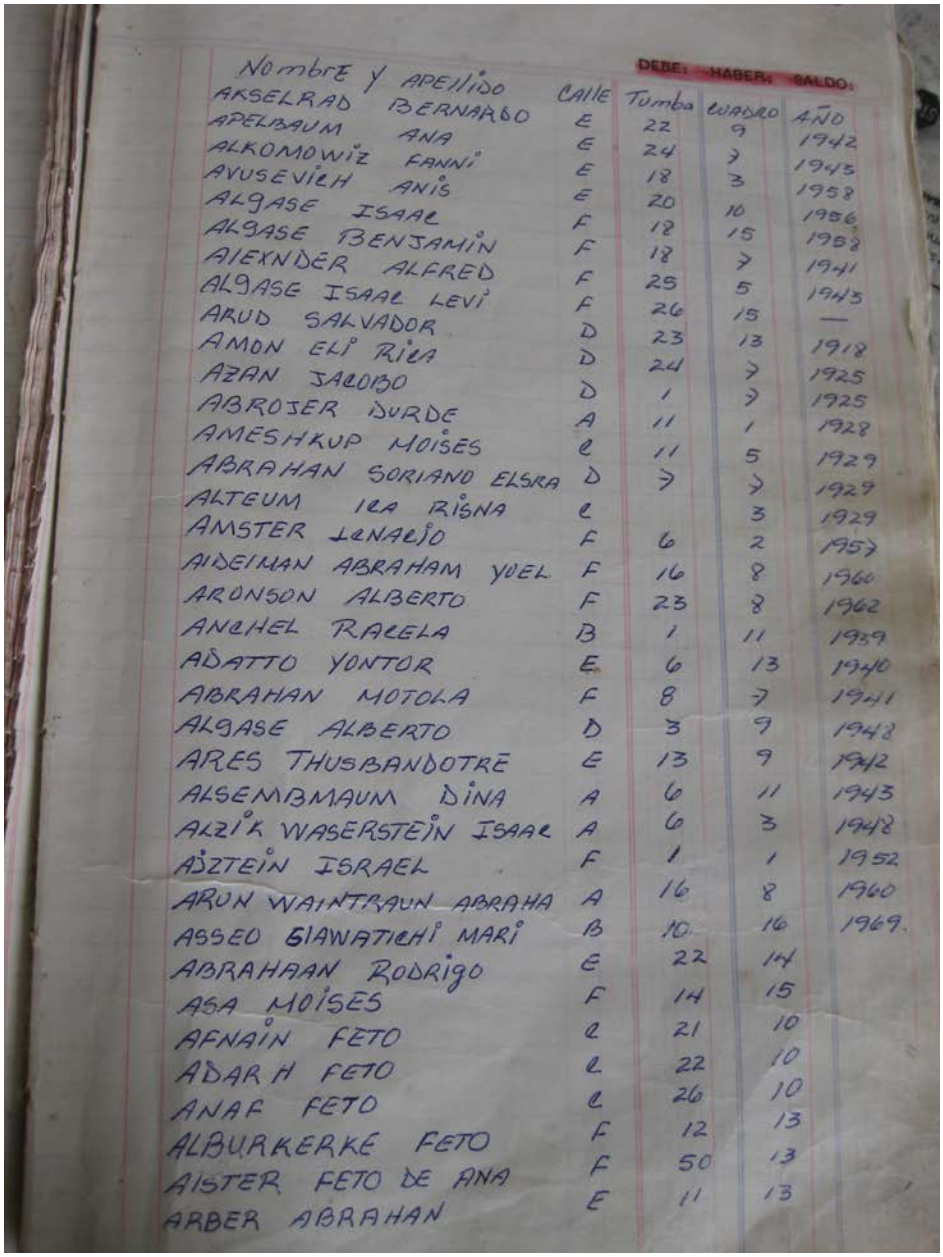
The sadness of encountering this site on the down-side of the hill is overwhelming, as one discovers the field of children's graves, those who died of what I was told was "the fever." A few of the markers are elaborate, but most are simple, inscribed only with first names: Mary, Peter, Jacob, Abraham, and on and on.

Figure 5. The Ashkenazi Holocaust Monument.

The Holocaust Monument in Ashkenazi Cemetery is inscribed with a dedication in honor of the 6 million Holocaust victims. Buried at the foot of the monument are bars of soap made from the fat of Jews burned in death camps. Notice the stones left by visitors to the site.

Figure 6. Grave of Saul Yenlin.

The large granite stone lying across this grave is in honor of Saul Yenlin who died at 44 years old. Known as "the father of the Cuban cinema," Stephen Spielberg visited here.



Nombre y Apellido	Calle	Tumba	Cuadro	Año
AKSELRAD BERNARDO	E	22	9	1942
APELBAUM ANA	E	24	7	1943
ALKOMOWIZ FANNI	E	18	3	1958
AVUSEVICH ANIS	E	20	10	1956
ALGASE ISAAC	F	18	15	1958
ALGASE BENJAMIN	F	18	7	1941
AIEXNDER ALFRED	F	25	5	1943
ALGASE ISAAC LEVI	F	26	15	—
ARUD SALVADOR	D	23	13	1918
AMON ELI RICA	D	24	7	1925
AZAN JACOBO	D	1	7	1925
ABROJER DURDE	A	11	1	1928
AMESHKUP MOISES	C	11	5	1929
ABRAHAN SORIANO ELSRA	D	7	7	1929
ALTEUM ICA RISNA	C		3	1929
AMSTER LENALJO	F	6	2	1957
AIDEIMAN ABRAHAM YOEL	F	16	8	1960
ARONSON ALBERTO	F	23	8	1962
ANCHEL RACELA	B	1	11	1939
ADATTO YONTOR	E	6	13	1940
ABRAHAN MOTOLA	F	8	7	1941
ALGASE ALBERTO	D	3	9	1948
ARES THUSBANDOTRE	E	13	9	1942
ALSEMBMAUM DINA	A	6	11	1943
ALZIK WASERSTEIN ISAAC	A	6	3	1948
AJZTEIN ISRAEL	F	1	1	1952
ARUN WAINTRAUN ABRAHA	A	16	8	1960
ASSEO SIAWATICHI MARI	B	10	16	1969
ABRAHAAN RODRIGO	E	22	14	
ASA MOISES	F	14	15	
AFNAIN FETO	C	21	10	
ADARH FETO	C	22	10	
ANAF FETO	C	26	10	
ALBURKERKE FETO	F	12	13	
AISTER FETO DE ANA	F	50	13	
ARBER ABRAHAN	E	11	13	

Figure 7. Page from a record book of the dead.

The record books of the dead are located in the gate-house, directly inside the gate of the Ashkenazi cemetery. These are records that identify the deceased by name, birthdate, death date, and location of the burial site. The oldest date on this page is 1918. The blanks indicate no death date, but pre-reserved burial sites.

Figure 8. Mastevot bearing a picture of the deceased.

A picture is embedded to memorialize this person's life. Inscriptions vary and can be written in Hebrew, Yiddish, or Spanish. Jewish symbols also vary, from Stars of David, Menorah, Candle-sticks, to Lions of Judah. Most matsevot are inscribed with the deceased name, date of birth and death, and place of origin. This is in accordance with Jewish tradition. Note the disrepair of the graves in the background. Grave robbers from the Palo Mayombe (also known as the Mayomberia) religion require bones of the unbaptized.

graves in this cemetery. The site was also a temporary cemetery used by the United States' military for soldiers who were killed or died from disease during the Spanish-American War, before it became a Jewish burial ground. Most of the Americans were later reburied in the US (United Hebrew Congregation Ashkenazi Cemetery, n.d.) Many of the Ashkenazi came with the Jewish diaspora from Eastern Europe in the 1920s and '30s. They were escaping anti-Semitism. According to the Jewish Burial Registry, most, but not all, buried in the United Hebrew Cemetery (UHC) are Ashkenazi Jews.

On my first visit to the cemetery in 2012, I was impressed by the oversized, Spanish, black iron gates that lock the entrance (the only entrance); protection for those who rest silently within the wall boundaries. There is a caretaker for the cemetery who lives near the site. He is easy to locate for gate-opening duties for those wishing to visit. Although he is not Jewish, he has held this job for over 20 years and is quite proud of his position (he and I became friends after I visited so many times). Entering through the front gate visitors see that it has its name boldly painted on the entrance walls along with the dates, 1906 on the left and 1910 on the right.

Even the layout of the cemetery follows Jewish tradition, with 2 small buildings located at the entrance: one for washing the dead, the other housing "the book of the dead" (see Appendix F). A faucet is on the outside for visitors to wash their hands when they leave, another Jewish custom. Beyond the gatehouses, the keeper, acting as guide, casually strolled amongst the slabs of marble and pointed out to me those he considered prominent. Perhaps this prominence was determined by the tomb's size and beauty. He paused beside one particular crypt, gesturing toward the large bronze menorah that lay on top of the waist-high, white marble. This is the gravesite of the late president of the Ashkenazi synagogue, Dr. Jose Miller, who died in 2002.

Venturing onward, to the left along the wall, is a monument that towers higher than the wall itself. With dignity it faces west, overlooking the graves that stretch row after row up the gently sloping hillside and then downward, the markers disappearing at the hilltop, leaving one to understand that there are many more unseen grave-sites on the down-side.

Very near Dr. Miller's monument is another in honor of the Holocaust victims. It is situated by the front wall and is a rather tall monument. I was informed that beneath the ground at the foot of the monument lie several bars of soap made from the fat collected from Jews incinerated in a death camp, buried there in recognition of the 6 million Holocaust victims. The inscription on the monument, written in Hebrew, underneath the Star of David, reads

> In tribute to their memory
> in this place are buried
> several bars of soap made
> from human Hebrew fat
> part of the 6 million
> victims of Nazi barbarism
> occurred in the twentieth century
> Peace to their remains.

It is a striking monument, a somber reminder of the past. Many visitors come to pay their respect at this memorial as evidenced by the mound of stones piled high in front of the marker. Leaving stones is a Jewish tradition. This custom, the laying of stones on the matsevot was culturally produced in deep-seated origins in the far-off lands of Moses, Abraham, and Saul.

A reference to the American Jews living in Cuba who helped fund the cemetery is noted in "La Habana" stated,

> Centro Macabeo was the Spanish part of the name for United Hebrew Congregation . . . founded in 1906 by North American Jews residing in Cuba . . . owned by the UHC. Members were mostly in Havana for business reasons and were among the wealthiest Jews in Cuba. English was the language of choice and members helped immigrants arriving in Cuba . . . After Castro the UHC disappeared. (La Habana, n.d. p. 4)

One stone of great interest in the UHC is very huge gray granite with white veins that run through it. It covers almost the entire half of the marble grave marker. I learned that here rests Saul Yinlen, who died young at 44 years old. He is very famous because of his work in the film industry in Cuba. I was told by the caretaker that Steven Spielberg made a special pilgrimage to visit this grave and film the stone. The cemetery keeper was very proud to point this out, understanding that I would know of Steven Spielberg, and the importance of such a famous person from the United States who visited his cemetery.

The Ashkenazi cemetery registry of approximately 1,600 graves in the United Hebrew Congregation Cemetery is divided between different locations: a partial record at the Orthodox Synagogue Adath Israel and another partial record on site at the cemetery itself. A report on *JewishGen Online Worldwide Burial Registry*, Project number (JOWBR, Cuba-00347), provided information on the Ashkenazi site (see Appendix F).

The Sephardic cemetery, which I also visited (Figures 9-12), lies some distance (about 1/2 mile) is within eyesight, yet very separate. It was founded in 1914 and is called the United Hebre Chevat Achim Sephardic Cemetery (The Museum of Family History, n.d.). Its entrance has large Spanish iron gates that are opened by a caretaker if one wishes to enter. The outside walls are stucco over brick, painted a soft creamy color and again, as with the Ashkenazi cemetery, lush magenta bougainvillea climbs and decorates. The same abundant growth of magenta bougainvillea also grows inside the entrance along the side of the small house where the dead are washed before burial. A tall palm stands guard some few feet inside as if to invite the visitor to the sacred site it protects. Nearby is the burial site of a Holocaust victim. This cemetery also has a Holocaust monument prominently placed near the entrance and its inscription reads (in part), “The Hebrews of Cuba dedicate this monument . . . in memory of the

millions of brothers sacrificed because of the Nazi Fascist barbarism . . . in Europe. . . . This monument was dedicated in March 1947 . . . Central of the Hebrew Societies of Cuba" (The Museum of Family History, n.d., ¶ 7). There are approximately 150 to 200 graves in the Sephardic cemetery (The United Hebrew Congregation, n.d.).

Figure 9. The gates of the Sephardic cemetery.

The Star of David is clearly visible to any who enter the entrance to the Sephardic Cemetery. Some of the letters have fallen off the Spanish black wrought-iron gate. You are entering the United Hebre Achim Sephardic Cemetery. Stars of David are also molded into the gates.

Figure 10. The Sephardic Holocaust Memorial.

Picture of Holocaust memorial in Sephardic Cemetery. Inscription in Spanish, in part, reads: The Hebrews of Cuba dedicate this monument to…of the…in memory of the millions of brothers sacrificed because of the Nazi Fascist barbarism during…in Europe.

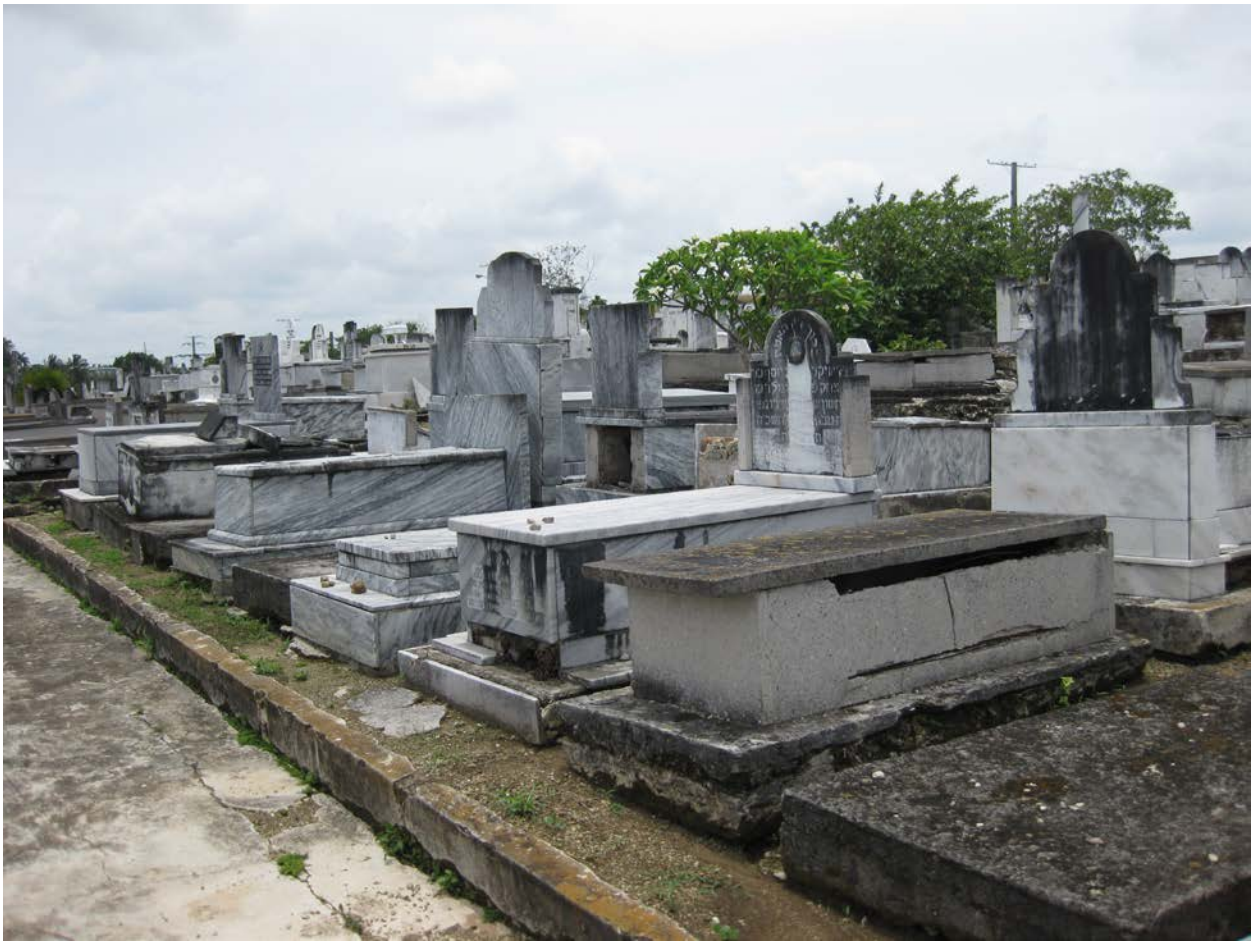


Figure 11. Graves in the Sephardic cemetery.

The layout of both the cemeteries holds to the universal Jewish tradition. Marble, and granite is used for matsevot, ohels, and sarcophagi. Limestone is sometimes also used.

Figure 12. Children's graves.

The tradition is the same for the children the Sephardic Cemetery. They lie together in a place of their own. Most of the tiny graves were children who died of fever.

CHAPTER V

DISCOVERY

Conclusion

Besides Ruth Behar's academic research on the Jews of Cuba, among other scholars who have focused on Cuba's Jews are Heidi Heft LaPorte, Jay Sweifach, and David Strug. Begun in 2005, their research was a part of a larger project by the Wurzweller School of Social Work and the Department of Family and Social Medicine of Yeshiva University. Their study "indicated that the Jewish community is well organized and with a centralized leadership and government" (LaPorte, Sweifach, & Strug, 2009, p. 313). They discovered that religion was discouraged between 1960 and 1990 which made it practically disappear. "Being Jewish was taboo . . . It was inconceivable that someone could be religious and a member of the Communist party . . ." (LaPorte et al., 2009, p. 317). However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, Cuba's government eased control, and in 1992 it modified its constitution to secular rather than atheist. Judaism returned openly with the environment more conducive to the "outward" expression of religion. However, "[s]till, there remains a certain aloofness between the Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jewish communities. This is due to many reasons, but mostly language barriers, social and cultural differences, and class discriminations . . ." (LaPorte et al., 2009, p. 319).

Considering history and memory, scholars Alisse Waterston and Barbara Rylko-Bauer, in their essay, "Out of the Shadows of History and Memory," had this to say:

> Shadows are often places of hiding, ephemeral or blurred, and they also soften that which appears stark or unbearable in the light . . . the process of remembering can be

> distressing, especially when trying to detail events that were traumatic in which one felt hopeless and helpless. (Waterston & Rylko-Bauer, 2006, pp. 485, 488)

As has been stated, the understanding of a "lived experience" is having lived through something. Jews have lived through traumatic stresses, hopelessness, and helplessness times. In the case of the Jews of Cuba, one can locate the blurring and shadows of a "lived experience" in their narratives.

During my visits to Havana with The University of Alabama, I sought out as many Cuban Jews as possible, who spoke English, to tell me about their lived experience as members of a small, diverse community. Even though an "outsider-within," I found the people, in most cases, to be friendly and open. To this day, I maintain friendships with these people (see Appendix G for a recent email). It is important to note, that my first visits were during the incarceration of Alan Gross, the American Jew imprisoned in Havana, accused of being an American spy because he was helping the Jews with internet technology. I was forewarned to be cautious so as not to cause the Jewish community harm. So I was not surprised that Gross was never talked about during my first three trips, although the "Five" (prisoners who were swapped for Gross) were mentioned briefly. On my fourth trip, however, the Five had been freed by the United States in return for the release of Alan Gross. There was still no mention of Alan Gross even then, and I did not ask.

In my opinion, the question "what does it mean to be a member of the Jewry in Cuba" is fractal, because being a Jew, especially in Cuba, has many angles and facets. Their lives are juxtaposed against each other, against other Cuban citizens, and even against Jews of other nations. Thus began the genesis for this research and my interest in the Jews of Cuba. Actually, it began with my undergraduate study of the Holocaust with Dr. Jerry Rosenberg as my professor

at The University of Alabama. Even as a graduate student, I continued to study the Holocaust era, taking another graduate course with Dr. Rosenberg on survivor narratives.

Actually, it was the non-fiction narrative, which led me to take my original trip with Alabama's Study Abroad Program with the English Department. The understanding was that I would have the opportunity to select any subject in Cuba I wished to write about. There was no question in my mind; I chose to investigate Jewish Cubans. With access to the Internet, I had already located a synagogue that invited guests to lunch. Also, through the Internet, I had discovered Guanabacoa[30] with two Jewish cemeteries. Considering my "second Sunday in May" heritage, for me, every gravestone was a narrative. I was hooked; I had to go to Guanabacoa. I asked, "What are their stories, how did these Jews get to Havana, and how had they retained their unique identity from all of the assimilated people in Cuba?"

The problem was that more than 50 years of embargo against Cuba had been imposed by the United States when I started my research. It separated mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, cousins, and friends from those who had left the island in the early 1960s. Would they be willing to speak with me, an American non-Jew? Also, when I started this research, the rush to understand how such a tiny group of ethnic and Orthodox Jews survived the Revolution with Castro's nationalization of Jewish enterprises, was not quite as hurried. But during the last 2 years of my research, however, the United States set about to normalize its relations, so timing was important for my study.

This study was rewarded by those who helped define the Cuban Jewish lived experience. If there is a memory trace in the narratives collected, it is linked to sadness; loved ones lost, home-lands no longer to be visited, relatives who no longer exist, all fragments of a past.

[30] A small city outside of Havana.

Perhaps Freud's "longing," or "archaic memory" can be located in the desire to stay in small groups, to be autonomous, so as not to stand out, to study and remember 5,000 years of Hebrew persecution, to follow the laws of Moses, and, at the end of their lives, to be buried "under the Star of David." Guanabacoa is proof of this. So are their children who learn to read and speak Hebrew.

As far as living conditions, the Jews, as well as all of the citizens of Cuba, have learned to live frugally, yet efficiently. They shop at the kosher butcher shop when it is open, they walk, they meet in groups and have parties to celebrate different special occasions, they read and study politics, they care for their elderly, and they brag on Cuba's great health care.

From my research, I found the Jewish lived experience in today's Cuba is much the same as it is with all Cubans; they make the most of what they have. What is different about the Jews is that they have a common bond: they stay together as much as possible, whereas other minorities, according to statics, have assimilated into the population. But those few Jews who held it all together, that small, tightly knit group of 400 who firmly maintained their Jewishness for over 50 years, did it through discreet weekly minions. And it is this continuum of reliving Jewish history from the Middle-Ages through the 19th century, and following instructions of the Torah, that give these same weekly gatherings the ability to reinforce Hebrew archaic memory: the identity of a diasporic minority.

The evidence is that Jews have made a valuable mark in Cuban history. They not only have established industry, they have swelled the value of the economy by becoming doctors, lawyers, bankers, and teachers, to name a few occupations. The Jews of Cuba were, and still are, community spirited. For instance, connected to the Temple Beth Shalom is the Patranato, located in Vedado, a once middle-class section of Havana. In this building, the Ashkenazi community

gathers for community services: feeding their elderly; providing rec center for exercises, library and study rooms for teaching the children Hebrew in the afternoons after school; and maintaining a pharmacy for the entire community, not just for Jews. It is supported by many Jewish charities such as B'nai B'rith Cuban, Jewish Relief Project, and other various Jewish groups. The Patronato also gives other items to those in need, such as clothing and food. This is amazing because the funds are very limited in all of Cuba, not only for organizations, but for all citizens of the island. In addition to feeding the elderly at the Beth Shalom Synagogue, the Adath Israel Orthodox congregation serves coffee and breakfast every day, as does the Sephardic synagogue. This community spirit is closely related to the socialist philosophy of Jose Marti.

With the reinforcement of memory traces that comes through the participation of the minion held in each the temple every morning, the community spirit is kept intact. As the earlier Jews stayed in a smaller groups because they had different cultural and linguistic productions, for today's Jews it is a practical approach to enduring. There was at one time a great divide in the Jewish community The Ashkenazi and the Sephardic were mostly separate; American Jews living in Cuba were separate; The Zionist faction tended to stay apart, as did another group who leaned towards socialism, communism, and atheism (even to the point of founding the Cuban Communist Party). Castro, however, after 1990, allowed Jews to immigrate to Israel due to his belief, not in the Zionist movement, but because of his belief in one's ties to "homeland." Therefore, the Zionist movement in Cuba became one factor that has kept Jewish number-ship in a fragile state, as so many have relocated to Israel. And now, with the United States' embargo perhaps being eased, the idea of moving to the United States may cause even greater loss in their numbers. But, the encouraging side of this for the Jews (and all islanders) is the fact that business interests may increase in Cuba because of less restriction. And all population will increase.

The Cuban newspaper, *The Havana Reporter*, had an article in its May 4, 2015, issue which stated, ". . . in recent months, U. S. media and analysts have been reporting on the increased interest within their society in close-up experiences of Cuba and in evaluation of business opportunities on the Caribbean island" (p. 14). This article continued to detail all of the dignitaries from the US who were interested in how to negotiate the legal "provisions imposed on Cuba negatively." It appeared that one of the most difficult issues was how to handle credit. To quote Andrew Cuomo, "this trip has reiterated the ideas I have held before I came, which is that the correct direction to go is the one towards the normalization of bilateral relations, given that the policy of isolation has proven ineffective" (Garcia, 2015, p. 14).

In my opinion, it will take years to undo the harm that the U.S. has committed against this small country, but I firmly believe that among the people of Cuba, if my research of the Jewish community is the warrant of proof, there is a willingness to improve relations with their neighbors. There is a huge billboard on the highway at the entrance into Havana that states, "Every step that we take should be accompanied by establishing a climate of order, discipline and excellence. Raul."[31]

Ruth Behar suggested that it is easy to spot a "Cuban Latin-Jew today because . . . [y]ou are raised on Goya and Manischevitz . . . and you dance merengue and salsa at Bar Mitzvahs . . . and furthermore, they speak fluent Spanish and move their hips like natives . . .. They do not fit into the 'Jewish' box" (Behar, 2000. p. xiii). Behar also explained that the main group of Jews who had settled in Cuba was only about 35 years old when Castro took control and during those 35 years, the economic standards of all Jews in Cuba had risen, making most middle to upper-class citizens. They had influence and wealth. Left behind by those who fled to the United

[31] Personal observation. May 2015.

States and Israel were those few who tried to keep their own identity, although intermarriage and acculturation played a big part into the "creation of a new Cuban national consciousness, where Cubans were Cubans above all else" (Behar, 2000, p. xv). Today, they are a dualistic society with very modern thought.

What role Jews will play in the future of Cuba is tenuous at best. It will be up to those who cling to their archaic memories to keep alive their Jewishness, and to keep the Cuban Jewry together. The new freedom to move to the United States, to Israel, or most anywhere, may be overwhelming. However, for those who stay, the core group is stubborn and will see to it that Jewish traditions and laws are kept, with Stars of David to symbolize the bonding link from the past to the present, and on into the future. Their Cuban Jewish narratives reveal their strength to survive.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

My formal interviews were generated from the following questions:

1. Where were your grandparents from?
2. If not from Cuba, where were they originally from?
3. Approximately what year did they arrive in Cuba?
4. Why did they leave their country of origin?
5. What occupation did they have?
6. Where were your parents from?
7. If they were from another country, what year did they arrive?
8. 8. What were their occupations?
9. What type of education did they have? High-school? College?
10. Where were you born?
11. What is your educational experience?
12. Were you separated from other Cuban Citizens because of your heritage?
13. Have you experienced anti-Semitism?
14. Do Cuban History text books explain Jewish history? Is the Jewish experience taught in public schools?
15. What is your understanding of "Secret Jews?"
16. Were you in Cuba in the late 1950s?
17. What was it like when so many Jews left Cuba?
18. What is your wish for the Jewish children of today's Cuba?
19. Do you keep the kosher law regarding food?
20. Tell me anything that you wish about your life as a Cuban Jew that you feel is special. Feel free to talk about anything that comes to mind.

APPENDIX B

Kosher Slaughtering

The word “shechitah” is used for properly slaughtering a cow using the kosher law. The reason for keeping kosher law is because it benefits the mind, body, and soul. Those who are not Jews benefit because the meat ensures the animal is of the best quality. Eating blood is not kosher therefore the esophagus and carotid must be cut quickly and efficiently with a sharp blade, then drained. It is believed that the blood contains the soul of the animal. Veins and arteries must be stripped from the carcass because they carry the blood. A kosher animal cannot be shot or stunned. The knife must be drawn from front to back. The knife must be visible (not stabbed or hacking the animal). The Sephardic tradition calls for the meat, after thorough inspection for disease, to be salted and left to drain for an hour while some traditions say one-half hour is enough to be kosher.

In Cuba, after the animal has gone through the process of being butchered by a licensed kosher butcher, it is then transported by truck to the shop to be sold. On certain days of the week, when the meat is delivered, the faded green metal corrugated doors are opened, not only to the Jewish community, but to anyone who wishes to buy meat. Today, there are some weeks that pass without the shop opening because no meat was available for slaughter.

APPENDIX C

History of Guanabacoa

The backstory of Guanabacoa does not begin with the Jewish settlement and their cemetery site. It has been studied by scholars and experts beginning with the evolution of Proto Cuba and, according to Roberto Gutierrez Domech and Manuel Rivero Glean, during the Upper Jurassic Stage, a "sea formed during the breaking up of the continent . . ." (2002, p. 23). The rock formations that lie longitudinally belting the island of Cuba are mostly

> harzburgite, Iherzolitte, serpentine, pyroxenite, amphibolite, gabbro, diorite, dolerite, basalt, and andersite . . . These dark, blackish-green colored rocks . . . outcrop in the Cajalbana del Rio . . . from Guanabacoa to Jaruco, in La Havana and Ciudad de La Habana . . . These rocks are generally mixed due to the displacements they have undergone which cause them to be found in their current positions. (Domeach & Glean, 2002, p. 23)

> American geologists state that in former ages what is now Cuba was two islands separated by a shallow sea. Its bottom, rising, has united them. One island has become the mountainous western end of Cuba and the other the even more mountainous eastern end . . .." (Wright, 1916, p. 9)

With the rising of the under-sea shelf, Guanabacoa was left a rich, hilly, and fertile land, perfect for farming and settlement.

The blurring of borders on the island probably began with the arrival of the first humans which has been established as approximately 3500 BCE (The First Cubans, n.d.). [32] Although Columbus' diary reflects confusion about where he had landed, he reported "palm-thatched huts of simple savages . . ." (Wright, 1916, p. 6). He had actually landed on the island of Cuba in 1492, where he discovered perhaps some of the same lineage of the island's first indigenous people. Conversation was difficult with the natives, but Columbus heard the name of a village called "Cubanacan" and thought he had landed in the region of Cathay. However, instead of following what he thought might be the 200-

[32] This date is from the time-line from "Early History." historyofcuba.com. Web retrieved 2/5/2015.

year-old trail of Marco Polo, Columbus discovered only primitive people and no treasures (Titherington, 1900, p. 2). Still believing he was near, Columbus explored the island further, with the intention of locating Cathay. Wright recounted,

> On November 2nd from a good port he called Rio de Mares he sent Rodrigo de Jerez and Luis de Torres, "who had been a Jew and was said to know Hebrew and Chaldean and some Arabic," inland accompanied by two natives he had taken from the Bahamas; they were to establish communication between him and the Grand Kahn. He careened his ships while he waited for them to return. On the 6th day they came, and reported encountering nothing more than a native village of fifty huts "and a thousand inhabitants," of whom no news of any Oriental potentate. The most significant sight these earliest explorers of Cuba saw was natives smoking tobacco. (1916, p. 6)

Although little is known of those early inhabitants, except for the writing of Columbus' scribes, the natives did leave artifacts as evidence of their long existence on the Island of Cuba. It is difficult to study aboriginals who have no written language, but archeologists have concluded that there were three distinct cultures: the Guanahatabeyes, the Ciboneyes, and the Tainos. The Guanahatabeyes are believed to be the first culture, existing on shellfish, mollusks, and fruit, living mostly in caves. Archaeologists also believe that the Guanahlatabeyes were becoming endangered at the time of Columbus' discovery of Cuba, due to many factors: disease, encroachment, and enslavement (The First Cubans, n.d.).

The second tribe was the Ciboneyes, a Stone Age culture. Scholars relate this group to the Arawak of South America. Their towns were built near fresh water that flowed into the sea. They were more advanced than the Guanahatabeyes, but fell to the third group, the Tainos, becoming their servants. By 1492, the Tainos, although more progressive than the Ciboneyes, were being encroached on and wiped out by yet another group who migrated into Cuba from South America. They were the Caribs, which means "cannibals" (The First Cubans, n.d.). The Caribs actually were a fourth culture; however,

they were considered invaders, not native inhabitants. According to historians, in the mid-16th century, Cuba's indigenous population had dropped to a few thousand (The First Cubans, n.d.) and in Guanabacoa, the Indian population had been reduced to less than a thousand (Worth, 2004). At one time the population was estimated to have been over 3,000,000 indigenous people inhabiting the island before Spanish arrival (The First Cubans, n.d.).

Columbus

> . . . never founded any settlement in Cuba, though on his second voyage (1494) he passed along almost the entire length of its southern coast, and on his fourth and last (1503) . . . he still believed that it was part of the mainland of Asia. He named it Juana, in honor of the Infant Juan (John), the son of his patrons, Ferdinand and Isabella . . .. (Titherington, 1900, p. 3)

In 1511, Diego Columbus, the son of Columbus, ruled Hispanola[33]. He sent Diego Velasquez to on a mission to Cuba along with Hernando Cortez. They established armed posts, and also established the same cruel rule of servitude and slavery over the natives as was used in the Spanish Inquisition and also in other Spanish colonies in the West Indies. This torturous treatment of the native people eventually caused their extinction (Titherington, 1900).

The Island of Cuba was under total Spanish rule after Diego Velazquez was appointed governor by Spain in 1511, a rule that lasted for 4 centuries (The First Cubans, n.d.) and Guanabacoa, being set apart by distance from the more developed cities and dense population, attracted diverse groups. By 1513, the first documentation of slavery was

[33] Spelling is by Titherington.

noted when Amador de Lares was given permission to bring four African slaves to Cuba from Hispaniola (AfroCuban History, n.d.). The population of Cuba rose as more slaves were imported to work in the gold mines or on the sugar plantations. This population growth also included the tiny settlement of Guanabacoa and, as Jane Landers writes

> During the first hundred years after the conquest, the population of Indians was considerably reduced, and from then on, their descendants–already mixed with whites, blacks, and other Indians who had been brought in as slaves from other islands and the continent–were concentrated in Guanabacoa . . . In a letter to the king dated September 21, 1608, Bishop Juan de Caberas de Altamirano said, "Varacoa and Guanabacoa are towns . . . [with] Indians living on the outskirts . . .. (1996, pp. 36-37)

The Bishop, in the same letter, noted a black population located in the area around Guanabacoa (Landers, 1996).

> Agriculture slowly gained a footing in Cuba, and commerce developed, gold seekers were no longer the only adventurers in the West Indies, and the day of the buccaneers passed away. Trade questions began to be the motives of political contention. (Titherington, 1900, p. 6)

Spain, the mother country, became more controlling of its colonies and in 1717, a proclamation was issued to the tobacco industry which caused hostility. Then, in 1739, the rift between Spanish and English traders caused a war to break out. This lasted 9 years. In 1762, Havana was captured by the British during the "Seven Years' War" (Titherington, 1900; Wright, 1916).

> A landing was effected at Guanabacoa . . . The British found the fevers of the Cuban coast a deadlier foe than the Spanish guns . . . The territory surrendered to the British stretched . . . to Matanzas . . . but peace was proclaimed . . . and they evacuated Cuba, George III's Government having accepted in exchange the Spanish province of Florida . . .. (Titherington, 1900, pp. 7-9)

The tiny settlement of Guanabacoa, the site of the "Battle of Guanabacoa" had "furnished fifty men of very mixed blood" who assembled under a captain of their own, were "…considered miserable and useless people, unaccustomed to arms" (Wright, 1916, p.

346). Although the British had won the battle, Guanabacoa with a small menagerie had made its mark in history, and today a marker in the town celebrates this battle.

APPENDIX D

Comprehensive Early History of Jewish Diaspora

The Jewish Diaspora: 597 BCE

To establish an understanding of Hebrew culture and its production, it is important to delve into its historical antecedents. For the Jews, its roots were founded with their rebellions against persecutors which brought about their movements beginning before the Roman/Jewish Wars, followed by Diasporas through the Middle Ages, the destruction of the Jewish Quarter in Palestine, and up to the point of the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and the ending of the Shoah.

The practice of deporting Jews (population movement) can be located in texts about the time of the Chaldean conquest of Jerusalem around 597 BCE, although it was the standard procedure even before that time in the area around Mesopotamia (Shiffman, 1991, p. 17). The Chaldean lands are basically located in the low, marshy, alluvial land and estuaries of the Tigris and Euphrates, whose run-off leads to the sea (now the Persian Gulf) (Schiffman, 1991, p. 82). After their conquest, Jews were confined to one community in Babylon, the capital city of the Chaldean empire. Judah was no longer an independent kingdom, which meant that the Jews were without a homeland, state, or nation. This period in Jewish history is called the "Exile" (Cohen, 1990, p. 120). Along with the conquest of the Jews by the Babylonians (now Southern Iraq), the First Temple, also called Solomon's Temple, was destroyed in 586 BCE (Smallwood. 1976,). This Temple, although it was not their first worship structure, was the first that was not portable, as was the Ark of the Covenant used by the Jews who followed Moses out of Egypt. This era for the Jews was designated as the Babylonian Diaspora and according to Smallwood,

> The dispersion of the Jews began with the sack of Jerusalem in 587 B. C. [BCE], when Nebuchadnezzar carried the inhabitants of the southern kingdom of Judah away into captivity beyond the Euphrates. Some of them, or their children, settled so happily in their place of exile that, when Cyrus overthrew Babylon in 538 and rescinded the decree of banishment, they chose to remain permanently in Babylon and Mesopotamia, forming the nucleus of what eventually became one of the largest and most important of the

> communities of the Diaspora during the Roman period, the Jews of Parthia. (Smallwood. 1976, p. 120)

During this "exile," the Jews of this time period settled into one community, continued traditional worship, co-existed with the Babylonians, and even border-crossed to the point of naming their offspring after Chaldean gods. (Cohen, 1999, p. 1). Thus, in 539, when Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon, the Jews had been living a half century in Babylonia and had assimilated, married, and had strong business interests there. Smallwood wrote, ". . . they chose to remain permanently in Babylonia and Mesopotamia . . ." even though [Cyrus had] given freedom to return to their homeland (Smallwood, 1976, p. 120). However, a small group of Jews did return to Judea about the year 536 BCE and started a rebuild of the First Temple (Martin, 1974, p. 267); this Temple, although not huge, stood out against the Jerusalem skyline probably becoming a target, because it narrowly escaped being destroyed in 332 BCE when the Jews refused to claim that Alexander the Great held a higher position than their Jewish god when he conquered Babylonia in 331 BCE (Shiffman, 1991, pp. 45, 214). In the writings of Josephus, Glatzer summarized,

> Very little is known about events in Judaea in the second century of Persian rule, which ended in 331 B. C. when Alexander the Great became master of the East and created the basis for an empire in which East and West would meet and Hellenic civilization would unite peacefully with the cultures of the East. (Glatzer, 1960, p. 14)

Victor Tcherikover, in his book *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews,* which covers the period from 332 BCE to the time when Alexander entered Palestine, established this era as a Hellenistic period (Tcherikover.1959). After Alexander's death (332 BCE) (Glatzer, 1960, p. 14) and the Ptolemies came to rule over Judea and the Temple, the Jews had a space of time during which their lives were less stressful (Smallwood, 1976, p. 120). According to Glatzer,

> In Judea, worldly "wisdom" was fostered by a new class of masters whose schools were independent of the priestly organization and its sacral traditions. Ancient Jewish

> dedication to the instruction of young and old could only be enriched by the Greek ideal of *paidia*, defined . . . as an education that aims at molding human character in accordance with an ideal and at fashioning each individual in the image of the community. (1960, p. 15)

But the Ptolematic army was defeated in 198 BCE and the policy towards the Jews changed in that Antiochus III (the conqueror) the Great, king of Syria, conquered the territory of Judea, wanted to Hellenize the Jews, changing some of the rules associated with Jewish celebrations (Smallwood, 1976, p. 505). Antiochus III died, and his first son was murdered, so Antiochus IV Epiphanes took over the throne and tried again to Hellenize the Jews, as did his father. Albertz wrote, "Judiam(s) . . . of the Hellenistic period can . . . be characterized as a form of religion that is based on an exclusive form of monotheism that was devoid of images . . ." (2003, p. xi). Therefore, when Antiochus IV outlawed Jewish religious observations of their Sabbath and circumcisions, erected a statue of Zeus in the Temple, and Hellenic priests began sacrificing pigs, great tension grew among the monotheist Jews (Smallwood, 1976, p.17). One account was that of a Greek official who asked that a Jewish priest perform a Hellenic sacrifice, so the priest, Mattathias, killed the official. The Jews supported Mattathias and his five sons (called the Maccabees, or Hasmonaeans, leaders of the war against Seleucid Syria) (Glatzer, 1960, p. 15) and rioted against the authority, oozing their freedom. Mattathias' son, Judas Maccabeus, re-dedicated the temple in 165 BCE (Smallwood, 1976, p. 3-7).

During the Roman era, the Temple was desecrated because the Jews would not put Alexander the Great ahead of their God, but it was left standing (Rhoades, 1976, pp. 68-72). Then, in 54 BCE, the Temple treasury was looted. Later, the looter, Crassus, was killed in battle, but when the Jews heard of the looting they revolted, only to be stopped (Rhoades, 1976, pp. 68-72). Rhoades wrote, as an antecedent to the displacement, or Diaspora, of the Jews, "We have to consider 6 CE as the year which inaugurated the historical period culminating in the Roman-

Jewish War" (1976, p. 20). Also, according to Sicker (2001), the dates between 6 CE through 41 CE mark the beginning timeline that caused the Jewish Diaspora, the "turbulent" years (p. xi). In those years, Rome dominated the region and continued its expansion in the "northern and southern parts of the Roman Empire" (Sicker, 2001, p. x), but found it necessary to stop Judean revolts which "would have driven a wedge" and separated the "Roman Empire in the east" (Sicker, 2001, p. x). Judean independence had to be stopped because of its importance due to geographical location (Sicker, 2001, p. x). Why was this land so important? "Judea, or Palestine as the Romans later named the territory, was situated on the land bridge between Africa and Asia," (Sicker, 2001, p. ix), a passage into Egypt. To the North lay the Mediterranean Sea, to the West the Libyan desert and to the South, the Ethiopian desert. Being a perfect bridge between Africa and Asia, control was worth war in that Hellenistic period (Sicker, 2001, p. 115). "During the Great Revolt of 66-73 CE . . . some Jews in Babylonia gave financial support to rebel forces, and a few went to Palestine to fight the Romans" (Schffman, 1991, p. 215).

Jews had been paying taxes as far back as 63 BCE (Smallwood, 1976, p. 150), but one especially vile imposition placed upon the Jews was the "Census of Quirinius," a land survey and population count, that was farmed out and Jews forced to become tax collectors. This, of course, caused strife among the Jewish community and Jewish tax collectors were hated (Smallwood, 1976, p. 151-153). One account is from Luke 19:1-10, when Zacchaeus is called out of a tree by Jesus. Jesus called Zacchaeus to come out of the tree because he wanted to stay at his house. This caused a commotion amongst Jesus' followers who saw him as associating with a dreaded "tax collector," considered a wealthy sinner (*NIV Holy Bible*, 1973). Using this incident with Zacchaeus, the conclusion can be drawn that the Romans were pitting Jews against Jews. This was also the case in the ghettos in Poland and elsewhere in other camps, in which Jews were

made police. They were, just as Jews were used to enforce Nazi law, made to perform cruel acts against fellow Jews in order to stay alive.

The year 63 CE marks Roman control over Palestine, although aggression over polytheist versus monotheist beliefs had begun long before this date. (Smallwood, 1976, p. 2). Glatzer wrote that,

> In the year 64 [CE], the year of the burning of Rome, Josephus . . . was sent on a diplomatic mission to Rome…When he returned to Judaea, he found the country ready to revolt against the Romans. The oppressive measures of the Roman procurators had become intolerable… (1960, p. 17)

Another reason for discontent among the Jewish population was that the "Jews of Egypt, in general, were classified as non-Greeks and put on a level with the Egyptians in being made liable for the tax . . . and Jews in Alexandria, despite their privilege position as a politeuma . . . were likewise liable" (Smallwood, 1976, p. 231). Interestingly, on a damaged papyrus the word "laographis" appears, which has been studied and indicates that the petitioner was "claiming exemption, although a Jew on the strength of his father's status as an "Alexandrian" and his own Greek citizenship . . ." proving that Jews were not liable for taxes if they held Greek citizenship (Smallwood, 1976, p. 232). But the catch was that Jews claiming such had to agree to join in "pagan worship," the penalty if one refused being "*laographis"* (Smallwood, 1976, p. 232). Also, according to Smallwood's study, ". . . wealthy Hellenized educated Jews" resented being "equated with illiterate Egyptian peasants" and covertly began to claim citizenship not only to escape "*laographia,"* but as a way to obtain "social and cultural status" (1976, p. 233).

It has been established that the Temple had been renovated again in about 20 BCE by Herod the Great (the half-Jew) (Smallwood, 1976, p. 56). It was renovated again during the Roman occupation of Judea, although the Temple was controlled by the Jews. It was destroyed in 70 CE by Titus in what is called "The First Jewish-Roman War." Just as the Temple was

destroyed, so was Jerusalem (Smallwood, 1976, pp. 88-89, 283). However, a group of Jewish "Zealot" refugees fled to the city of Masada. The Roman army, being unable to climb to the camp without being seen, had slaves (Jewish captives) build a ramp to Masada. The Zealots put up a battle for as long as possible until it was evident that they could hold out no longer, so they killed themselves, marking this as the last date that Israel was a state until 1948 (Smallwood, 1976, p. 399).

Josephus' (the leader of the Jewish forces in Galilee) account of the war described the horrendous suffering in Jerusalem which brought its destruction as

> The roofs were full of women and infants in the last stages of exhaustion, the alleys with the corpses of the aged: children and young men, swollen with hunger, haunted the market places and collapsed wherever faintness overtook them . . .. And throughout these calamities, no weeping or lamentation was heard: hunger stifled the emotion, and with dry eyes and grinning mouths those who were slow to die watched those whose end came sooner. Deep silence blanketed the city, and night laden with death was in the grip of yet fiercer foe—the brigands. They broke as tomb plunderers into the homes, rifled the deceased and stripped the coverings from their bodies, then departed laughing; they tried the points of their swords on the corpses, even transfixed some of the wretches who lay prostrate but still living, to test the steel, and any who implored them to . . . end their misery, they disdainfully left to perish with hunger (Newsome, 1992, p. 305-306)

Another historian, a Roman named Dio Cassius, who wrote *Dio Cassius, Historia Romana LXVI,* described the Jewish War of 66-70 CE, which was written from the perspective as a Roman. His work actually agreed with much of Josephus' writings. In Cassius' version, he told of the Jews having to pay taxes in order to worship in their own tradition (Rhoades, 1976, p. 17). Cassius also stated that the Jews were not defeated until the Temple was set on fire (Rhoades, 1976). The Jews revolted again against their oppressors in 132-135 CE, when Simon bar Kochba and Rabbi Akiva wanted to rebuild the Temple (Schafer, 1995, pp. 148-149). The revolt failed, which led to executions, and the Jews were exiled from Jerusalem by the Roman Empire. This was called "The Second Jewish-Roman War" (Otzen, 1990, pp. 8-12).

Following the continuum of harassment, a succession of Roman Emperors accused the Jewry of not honoring the emperor of the day. There were disputes between the Jews and the Greeks. For example, one emperor, Caligula, ordered a statue of himself be put in the Temple. It was written that Caligula '. . . regarded the Jews with the most especial suspicion, as if they were the only persons who cherished wishes opposed to his" (Cohen, 1999, p. 32). Although Caligula died, it did not stop Jewish persecution. In 46 CE, an insurrection by the Jews broke out in the province of Judea. It was the Jacob and Simon uprising and lasted between 46 CE and 48 CE. It was centered around Galilee, but was put down by the Romans, resulting in the execution of Jacob and Simon (Cohen, 1999, p. 261).

The Jewish rebels were scattered or sold into slavery. Hadrian attempted to do away with Judaism, which he considered the root of rebelliousness that caused the Bar Kokhba Revolt. Hadrian prohibited the Torah and the Hebrew calendar. He also executed Jewish scholars. On the Temple site, Hadrian placed a statue of Jupiter and also one of himself. He also took the name of ancient Israel from the maps and replaced it with Syria Palestina, deleting names such as Judea. Jews were then barred from entering the city, except on the first day of Tisha B'Av. Thousands of Jews had been made slaves over the past centuries due to their revolts, wars, and disenfranchisement. Many were transported to the West, forming communities in Italy, Spain, and Gaul (Newsome. 1992. pp. 311-315).

According to the writings of Josephus Flavius (Josephus' Roman name) (37 CE-100 CE), the biggest population of Jews after Israel and Babylonia was Syria (Glatzer, 1960, p. 84), although Jews had scattered far and wide, some with the leaders of lost wars, some because of relocation, and some who moved because they chose to do so. After Josephus was captured and executed, Jerusalem was turned into a pagan city and all Jews were expelled (Newsome. 1992.

313-315). Even when the Jews were expelled and new communities were formed, they kept their traditions alive, their traditions bound to the Torah, not the earth where they lived. According to Smallwood, the destruction of the Second Temple in about 70 CE changed the course of Jewish history (Smallwood. 1976, p. 290).

Jews in the First Century through the Middle-Ages

Historians record the Mediterranean basin being populated by exiled Jews, as were such distant lands as India, China, and Syria. There is a report that 10,000 Jews were massacred near Damascus (Hegermann, 2008, p. 115-166). The Diaspora was made up of those who migrated due to wars, discontentment, slavery, or exile. There were three primary groups within the Jewish Diaspora: the Ashkenazi who immigrated to Central and, later, Eastern Europe; the Sephardic Jews who settled in Iberia (Spain and Portugal) and, later, North Africa; and the Mizrahi Jews who stayed on in Babylon (Ancient Jewish History, n.d., pp. 1-2). Although separated by continents and languages, the Jewry of all the groups shared a cultural identity: heritage.

The Spanish Inquisition in the 15th Century was a result of, among other continuing factors associated with being Sephardic Jews, the "Reyes Catholicos" (Catholics and monarchs, Isabella and Ferdinand) reconquering Spain from the Arabs. Jews were ordered to convert to Catholicism, leave the country, or face execution. Those who left went to North Africa, Europe, and even Latin America (Cuba) (Wright, 1970, pp. 50-60). This expulsion was in 1492 due to the Alhambra decree. Some Sephardic Jews who converted to Catholicism, but kept their Jewish faith, were called marranos (secret Jews) and settled in Hamburg and around that area of Germany in the 16th Century. Some even migrated to the United States, formed communities, and built their own Temples (Christian-Jewish Relations, 1992, pp. 1-3). The Ashkenazi

population, according to some studies, expanded from the Middle East after the destruction of the Second Temple to Italy and into France, reaching the Rhine Valley in the 10th Century. The word, "Ashkenazi," refers to a division of Jewish religious traditions rather than to an ethnic division and, therefore, may be mixed with the Sephardic groups due to the exile and Jewish migration from Spain during Islamic persecutions in the 11th and 12th Centuries, the Christian era of the 13th through 15th Centuries, and the Spanish Inquisition in the 15th through the 16th Centuries. The mix occurred when they settled in the same communities (Schoenberg, n.d.).

Martin Luther (1483-1546) influenced the Christian world, especially those in Rome and Germany with his anti-Semitisms. In his writing entitled, "The Jews and Their Lives," Luther called Jews, amongst other much worse names, "blind stupid fools." His wrath stems from the fact that he tried to get the Jews to convert to Christianity and when they refused, he turned against them. Because of Luther's theological positions, his views were positively accepted. Therefore, his influence was widespread and on-going. This was evidenced by Hitler's adoption of Luther's ideology that "all Jews should be burned," which set in motion the Holocaust (Martin Luther, n.d.).

Anti-Semitism, as a continuum, was of ever-growing concern for the Jews during the 19th and 20th Centuries. Theodor Herzl was born in Budapest and at 18 years old, moved with his family to Vienna. After completing his doctorate he was appointed as the Paris correspondent of the Viennese *Neue Freire Presse*, where he observed growing anti-Semitism in France and other countries. He concluded that, "The Jews…were a people who must reestablish themselves as a nation on their own soil" (Martin, 1974, p. 335). Although Herzl published a book about it which appeared in 1895 titled *Der Judenstaat,* he believed that anti-Semitism was becoming worse for the Jews in host countries due to declining political, economic, and social

pressures. From there the movement took root and after a Zionist congressional meeting in Basel, Switzerland, a platform was adopted that read, "To create a publically recognized, legally secured home for the Jewish people in Palestine" (Martin, 1974, 336). Suggestions were made for a territory in the British East African territory of Uganda as a temporary state for the Jews, but it was clear that this was not Palestine. After his sixth failed attempt at getting Zionists to come to some agreement concerning Uganda, Herzl died (Martin, 1974, p. 338).

One reason for the dispute amongst the Jews of Europe and America was that the bond between Jews was considered "religious only" by some (Martin, 1974, p. 339) and return to their own soil was not necessary to be Jewish. The Pittsburg Platform of 1885 read, 'We consider ourselves no longer a nation but a religious community and expect no return to Palestine" (Martin, 1974, p. 339). This reform movement was firm until 1930 and the rise of Nazism (Martin, 1974, p. 339). On the other hand, however, another faction of Zionism felt that the effort to carve out a homeland again was "forcing of the end" and that it should be God, not man, who took the Jews back to Palestine (Martin, 1974, p. 339). There was also a split headed by Aaron David Gordon's "mystical religion of labor" (Martin, 1974, p. 342). Ahad Ha-Am contended that Jews had been "corrupted by assimilationist tendencies, had lost their self-respect and dignity, and had become obsessively concerned with their standing . . . in the gentile world" (Martin, 1974, p. 343). These Jews were considered Cultural Zionists. So, during the years between 1895 and 1917, the Zionist movements were hashing out their differences, and the Arabs of Palestine took notice, fearing a take-over by the Jews who were returning to Palestine in droves due to European persecution, especially in the early 1900s to1930s (Martin, 1974, p. 346). According to Martin, "The numbers of immigrants rose to more than two hundred fifty thousand. . . . Over seventy thousand . . . refugees . . . thousands of children and young people

brought to Palestine from Germany and elsewhere in Europe . . . while thousands were still seeking frantically to leave their countries . . .” (Martin, 1974, p. 46).

The scandal involving a Jewish French Military officer, Alfred Dryfus, shocked the Jewish world in 1896. He was accused of passing intelligence to the Germans. Found guilty, he was court marshalled and marched through Paris as by-standers shouted, “Death to Judas. Death to the Jew.” Actually, French intelligence located other materials that pointed to someone other than Dryfus as the traitor. But it was discovered too late. The damage had already been done causing anti-Semitism to deeply divided France. This caused the Jewish population to believe that their only hope against discrimination and harassment would be to establish a national homeland, thus began a real Zionist movement in Europe and abroad (Martin, 1974, pp. 346-350).

In 1917, a statement by the British Foreign secretary, Arthur James Balfour, declared

> . . . that the British government favors, “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.” (Martin, 1974, p. 345)

This announcement took place just after the beginning of World War I. The Declaration was ratified by the Allied Powers, the US included. Those factions of Jews who had been in disagreement saw this as a positive step because Polish Jews were being persecuted and those leaving needed a place to settle (Martin, 1974, 346). The Jews were keenly aware of the Dryfus affair, understood the importance of establishing a safe-place, a homeland in Palestine that would establish them as a nation and a voice. “This letter was accepted by The League of Nations on July 24, 1922, and embodied in the mandate that gave Great Britain temporary administrative control of Palestine” (Martin, 1974, p. 348).

The British "White Papers" of 1922, 1930, and 1939 were the result of re-evaluation of the Balfour Declaration. The politicians of 1917 were not in power by the year 1922. Riots had broken out in Palestine between 1920 and 1921. The situation was complicated and involved agreements between Britain, France, and Russia over the Ottoman Empire breaking up the Arab territory. Winston Churchill created the 'White Paper of 1922" which was to reform and rethink the Balfour Declaration with the idea of pacifying the Arabs and keeping Palestine from the French. The White Paper also recognized the Zionist movement. In July of 1922, the British portioned off Palestine by separating the territory east of the Jordan River. The "White Paper" of 1930, drawn up by Colonel Secretary Lord Passfield on policies of Palestine, was pro-Arab/anti-Zionist because it recommended limiting Jewish immigration and land ownership. The "White Paper" of 1939 clearly defined limits of immigration numbers into Palestine, sealing the fate of those Jews caught in Nazi territory (Martin, 1974, pp. 348-350). The last "White Paper" created panic for those seeking asylum from Hitler's pogroms. The Jews of Palestine, Martin wrote, although stunned by this latest mandate, did not stop trying to rescue Jews from Europe, smuggling as many into Palestine as they possibly could. The reality was that a sense of urgency in the fight to establish a State of Israel was a cohesive agent, rallying Jews everywhere. (Martin, 1974, p. 348). The Arabs in Palestine revolted to the influx of Jews, especially concerned with the idea of a "Jewish Nation." In May, 1848, a combination of Egyptian, Jordanian, Syrian, and Iraqi soldiers entered Palestine, although Jordan had promised not to attack the Jews (Tal, 1948, p. 153). Israeli forces and Jewish settlements were attacked. They fought for a period of over 10 months, although there were two truce periods in the Sinai Peninsula and Southern Lebanon (Shlaim, 1995).

John Phillips wrote of the attacks on the Jewish Quarter in Jerusalem in his book entitled *A Will to Survive*:

> . . . Aware that the sack of the Jewish quarter would shock the western world, Arab authorities across the Middle East tried to prevent the news from leaking out. Jerusalem could not be mentioned under any circumstances. A dutiful Cairo censor even wanted to blue-pencil every reference to Jerusalem in the Bible of a departing tourist . . . I learned how Arab hostility for the Jews was encouraged by French colonials. Politically Algeria was a French territory; in fact, it was as colonial as Palestine, where I had a chance to observe "the Palestine Problem." (Phillips, 1977, p. 2)

John Phillips' Algerian upbringing was his ticket into Jerusalem to photograph the war. Phillips' belief was that there were two idealistic and unworkable sacred deals between Britain and France at the end of World War I, "…in which both agreed to keep for themselves those Turkish provinces the Arabs considered Arab and the Jews National Home" (1977, p. 3). The French would get Damascus and the British, Jerusalem. However, Arab intelligence feared radical changes if the Zionists got a homeland. Britain simply gave the U.N. the problem to solve in 1947 and this led to Palestine being divided into two independent states (Phillips, 1977, p. 8).

Continuing, Phillips states

> May 1948 . . . I got my first look at the Jewish Quarter under fire . . . From a spot near the Wailing Wall. I could see Porat Josep synagogue rising in the distance across no-man's land. The synagogue, with its adjoining Talmdie schools and academy, was disintegrating behind billows of smoke . . . I wondered how much TNT the Arab Liberation Army would squander to reduce this seat of learning to dust . . . Dazed by the shelling, the civilians gathered up their belongings and trudged off to Ashkenazi Square. There I came upon a scene of human misery as old as time itself. Families gazed for the last time at their homes . . . I photographed . . . The smell of burning mixed with the smell of death . . . Down Beilt El a proud Moslem led the way, followed by his barefoot wife carrying three wooden containers of Sephardic scrolls from a nearby synagogue . . . My last recollection of the Jewish Quarter on that afternoon of May 29, 1948, was the sight of a charred body in a doorway—the last Jew in the Quarter for nineteen years to come. (Phillips, 1977, p. 9)

The paradigm continued for Jews in the Quarter as always: they were "other," marginalized, and persecuted. Yet despite all of these trials, and despite the destruction of their Temples, the Jewish people managed to retain their distinct characteristic: allegiance to their heritage and cultural traditions. For those Jews who had escaped from Hitler's Nazism into Palestine, their safe-place, Golda Meir writes

> . . . it is the tragedy of our century that we have to look so often into the eyes of ordinary, confused, and weary human beings who are frightened and in pain and who, through no fault of their own, have been forced to experience the terror of war . . . My deepest hope, which, of course, I share with all Israelis, is that peace will come soon to my country and we will, at least, be allowed to devote ourselves entirely to the purpose for which the State of Israel was created: developing the land for the good of all its inhabitants . . .. (Phillips, 1977, p. 1)

APPENDIX E

IRB Approval

Office for Research

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA RESEARCH

January 7, 2015

Dorothy D. Franklin
Interdisciplinary Studies
The Graduate School
The University of Alabama
Box 870244

Re: IRB # EX-15-CM-002 "The Cuban Jewish Experience"

Dear Ms. Franklin:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your protocol has been given exempt approval according to 45 CFR part 46.101(b)(2) as outlined below:

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:
(i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Your application will expire on January 6, 2016. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of Continuing Review and Closure From. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of FORM: Continuing Review and Closure.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the assigned IRB application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

358 Rose Administration Building
Box 870127
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487-0127
(205) 348-8461
FAX (205) 348-7189
TOLL FREE (877) 820-3066

Director & Research Compliance Officer
Office for Research Compliance

APPENDIX F

Layout of a Jewish Cemetery

1. The general cemetery layout holds to Jewish tradition. A room for washing the deceased is located at the entrance of the cemetery with an outside working faucet to allow the visitors to wash their hands on leaving.
2. Some matsevot follow the naming convention of Spanish America. In most Hispanic countries, people use two last names. Both Ashkenazim and Sephardim used the Spanish convention. The first is the name of the father and the second is that of the mother. It is correct to call a person by the first of the two names (the name of one's father) or by both names. A married woman can add the preposition "de" before her husband's last name. So our full names could be Stephen Denkar Epstein and Elayne Webber Kruger de Denkar . . . several specific cases where the family was originally of European descent and their family today (mostly in the United States) know their Cuban relative by only one surname or the other, not necessarily as they appeared on the matseva. All spellings of surnames and given names in our list are as found on matsevot.
3. Sections C11, D1, and D9 contain many children's graves . . . Many of the young children and babies' graves are either unmarked or completely illegible. We are unsure whether they were intentionally left unmarked by custom or just worn. Some very young children's graves and several teenagers had specifically identified graves and matsevot.
4. Many matsevot have a very shallow relief and were difficult to read. The stones are aligned so they face directly east or directly west…
5. The matsevot and ohels show different burial traditions and languages. Inscriptions are in English, Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian, and Spanish. Memorial artwork includes universal Jewish symbols-menorah, candle-stick, Star of David, and lion. Inscribed birthplaces are from Eastern and Central Europe, and Cuba.
6. There are definite patterns of matsevot inscriptions. We saw distinct differences in the presentation of information on matsevot: date and place of birth; Hebrew date of death, description of deseased, inclusion of art, special expressions of love or respect, including poetry and phrases, matsevot materials and size; but no clues to wealth or Community status. For example, graves are no segregated by bender or wealth. They appear to be mostly organized by date of death. There are a few family plots and no societies.
7. The letters "E.P.D." that appear on some matsevot are from the Spanish "en paz desonse"--for "rest in peace."
8. There are two memorial centographs in the cemetery: one is a memorial to Holocaust victims along front wall and the other is a Machado Martyrs cenotaph to Jewish Communists of the Popular Hebrew Center – Noske Yalub 1927, Bernado Reinharz 1930, Boris Waxman 1932, Isaac Hurvitz 1932, and Yankel Burstein 1932 located along street C, block 4…
9. Extracted from pages 8 – 11 Jay Levinson, The Jewish Community of Cuba 1906 – 1956 (Nashville Tennessee; Westview, 2006) Levinson describes the Cuban Jewish community in its Golden Age, how Jews fleeing from persecution abroad found refuge in Cuba, adjusted to a new country and built a vibrant Jewish presence in Cuba and how sociological, linguistic, and cultural differences changed at different periods of time, but always separated them.

This cemetery information came from Project number [JOWBR, Cuba-00347]. "The United Hebrew Congregation Ashkenazi Cemetery at Guanabacoa/Havana, Cuba." Retrieved from http://data.jewishgen.org/imagedata/jowbr/CUBA-00347/uhcc.html.

APPENDIX G

Personal Email From Jews in Cuba

Personal Email from Cuba

Email received from Vedado, Cuba to Frank013@bama.ua.edu. Thu. Jan. 29, 2016 at 9:01 am

Sent: Wednesday, January 21, 2015 at 8:28 am

Subject: Re: friend from Alabama

Dear Dorothy:

Thanks a lot for your fast answer and details of where you live and work…We agree completely with all you wrote. Its very unfortunate the separation of families principally, because of the embargo and the economical situation damaged for a very long time. To many buildings in very bad conditions…We hope that with the agreements between USA and Cuba, the situation will be normalized in a short time. Its as you said. That 50 years is way too long.

Keep well and thanks for your kind friendship.

Loves and regards,

XXX and XXX[34]

Ps. We will have problems for some days with the server, but we don't know since when…so if you write as soon as is restored I'll answer.

[34] Names have been redacted according to IRB agreement.