

University of Miami, Spring 2008

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Mondays, 3:35-6:05pm

JUS 410/LAS 301/LAS 503/SPA 312

**CUBAN JEWS:  
DIASPORA, IDENTITY, AND THE SEARCH FOR HOME**

**Course description.** Jews have haunted Cuban history since the discovery of the island by Columbus. But not until the early twentieth century could Jews openly live as Jews in Cuba. American Jews, as well as Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews from Europe, then began to be drawn to Cuba, where they built a thriving and diverse Jewish community that fell apart after the Cuban revolution of 1959. Cuban Jews who left the island for Miami recreated their identity as “Jubans” and became part of the transformation of Miami into a global city. Cuban Jews who stayed on the island learned to live as invisible Jews in a communist country, but later they revitalized Judaism with support from American Jewish philanthropists.

This course offers the challenge of focusing on a small community in order to understand large philosophical issues: What is the meaning of diaspora? How do people hold on to a unique identity in the midst of cultural fusions? Why search for home in an age when the soul is global? More specifically, we will want to ask what is exceptional about the Jewish experience in Cuba compared to other Jewish diasporas in Latin America. We will use a multidisciplinary approach to seek answers to these questions. Together we will immerse ourselves in the scholarly and artistic literature, as well as a selection of films, by and about Cuban Jews. We will carry out ethnographic research in Miami to build a living history archive on the Cuban Jewish experience that will incorporate documents, oral histories, photographs, and videos. Field trips to Cuban Jewish sites in Miami will be incorporated into the course and all students will have the opportunity to intern with a Cuban Jew, in fields ranging from medicine to real estate to business to music and dance, to learn firsthand about their lives.

The ultimate goal of the course is not simply to learn about the diaspora of Jews to Cuba, but to learn how to do creative ethnographic research on the history of the present. Grades will be based on class participation, two short essays about the readings, and a research project. Course is limited to juniors and seniors. No previous background required, but previous coursework in anthropology, history, Judaic Studies, or Latin American and Caribbean Studies will be helpful. Students in art, communication, and photography are also invited to participate.

**Course plan.** The format of our course meetings will be divided between lectures, discussion of readings, student presentations, viewing of films, interaction with guest speakers from the Cuban Jewish community, and fieldwork carried out as a group and individually. We will all participate in a few field trips to Cuban Jewish sites in Miami.

**Course requirements.** Students are expected to participate actively in class discussions and to do independent thinking and research for assigned essays. Each student will sign up for an oral presentation for one week of the course and help lead our discussion of that day's reading. For the final project, each student will produce a work of original research and writing.

**Grades.** I will assess your grade on a combination of factors:

- 1) an oral presentation, as well as regular class attendance and participation
- 2) two short writing assignments due on March 7 and April 4 (5-7 pages each)

3) a final research project (12-15 pages) to be presented on the last day of class.

You have two choices for the final project:

**Mini-ethnography:** A project that involves a combination of historical research, observation, interviewing, and interaction. It can also incorporate visual media, such as photography and video.

**Analytical paper:** A project for which you choose a topic that arose in the course readings or discussion that you wish to explore in more detail. The paper may focus on one particular work, or compare an issue that arises in multiple works. In addition to the source(s) from the course, the paper must include several independent bibliographic source you will add.

A prospectus detailing your plans for the final project is due on Monday, February 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Readings.** All the required books and many of the recommended books will be on reserve at the Library. They can also be purchased at the University Bookstore. The other required readings (articles and chapters) are available as pdf files on the course Blackboard site.

The required books are:

Ruth Behar, *An Island Called Home: Returning to Jewish Cuba*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2007.

Caroline Bettinger-López, *Jewish-Cuban Journeys: Searching for Identity, Home, and History in Miami*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000.

Theodore A. Rees Cheney, *Writing Creative Nonfiction: Fiction Techniques for Crafting Great Nonfiction*. Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2001.

## CLASS SCHEDULE

**A note about the readings:** Each week there is the option to do the required readings and, if you wish, the recommended readings as well. graduate students should do both sets of readings. films are considered required material and need to be seen before the date on which they will be discussed.

*January 14: First class. Introduction to the course*

*January 21: Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday. No class. If there is interest, we can reschedule this class for another day in the week or organize a field trip.*

*January 28: History and Settlement of the Jews in Cuba*

Judith Laikin Elkin, *The Jews of Latin America* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1998): 88-92.

Robert M. Levine, *Tropical Diaspora: The Jewish Experience in Cuba*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1993, Chapter 2, "The Immigrant Generation," 29-78; Chapter 6, "La Gloria Eres Tú," pp. 189-234.

Haim Avni, "Jews in Latin America: The Contemporary Jewish Dimension" in *Judaica Latinoamericana: Estudios Históricos-Sociales* (Jerusalem: Amilat, 1988): 9-12.

Margalit Bejarano, "The Deproletarianization of Cuban Jewry," in *Judaica Latinoamericana: Estudios Históricos-Sociales*, pp. 57-67.

Margalit Bejarano, "Sephardic Jews in Cuba – From all their Habitations," *Judaism*, winter 2002 (brief article).

Pinkhes Berniker, "Jesús," short story in *Yiddish South of the Border: An Anthology of Latin American Jewish Writing*, edited by Alan Astro (University of New Mexico Press, 2003): 137-148

Abraham Josef Dubelman, "The Faith Healer," short story in *Yiddish South of the Border: An Anthology of Latin American Jewish Writing*, edited by Alan Astro (University of New Mexico Press, 2003): 148-153

### **Recommended:**

Boris Sapir, "The Jewish Community of Cuba: Settlement and Growth" (New York: JTS University Press 1948): 1-94.

Margalit Bejarano, *La comunidad hebrea de Cuba: La memoria y la historia* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1996): 1-7; 14-25; 36-47.

Maritza Corrales, "Cuba: Paraíso recobrado para los judíos," in *De dónde son los cubanos* (Habana: Editorial de las ciencias sociales): 167-203.

Alan Astro, "La literature yídish de Cuba," *Cuadernos Americanos* 96 (2002): 193-207.

*February 4: Jewish Cubans and the Cuban Revolution*

José Martí, "Nuestra América/Our America" (1895), "The Third Year of the Cuban Revolutionary Party" (1894), "To Manuel Mercado" (1895) in *The Cuba Reader* (Grove Press, 1989).

Benjamin Keen, *The Cuban Revolution* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996): 409-437.

Gilbert W. Merkx, "Jewish Studies as a Subject of Latin American Studies," Judith Laikin Elkin and Gilbert W. Merkx, *The Jewish Presence in Latin America* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1990): 3-10.

Robert M. Levine, *Tropical Diaspora: The Jewish Experience in Cuba* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1993), Chapter 7, "A Second Diaspora," 234-282; Chapter 8, "Lessons of the Cuban Jewish Experience," 283-305.

Robert M. Levine, "Adaptive Strategies of Jews in Latin America." In Elkin and Merkx, *The Jewish Presence in Latin America*, pp. 71-84.

Robert M. Levine, "Identity and Memories of Cuban Jews," in *The Jewish Diaspora in Latin America and the Caribbean: Fragments of Memory* edited by Kristin Ruggiero (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press 2005): 115-123.

Haim Avni, "The Origins of Zionism in Latin America." In Elkin and Merkx, *The Jewish Presence in Latin America*, 135-155.

\*\*\*\*FILM: Robert Levine and Mark D. Szuchman, *Hotel Cuba: A Historical Diary of the Pre-Castro Jewish Experience* (1984).

### **Recommended:**

Fernando Ortiz, "Defensa cubana contra el racismo antisemita," (Asociación Nacional contra las Discriminaciones Racistas," 1939).

Abraham Z. Vainstein, "De Cara al Sol": Homenaje a Martí en Yiddish" (Habana: Ediciones de la Agrupación Cultural Hebrea-Cubana" (1954).

"Lo hebreo en el pensamiento de José Martí" (1954)

"A todos los Hebreos de Cuba" (Habana: Union Hebrea de Cuba, 1962).

Margalit Bejarano, *La comunidad hebrea de Cuba: La memoria y la historia* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1996): 228-257

Osher Schuchinsky, "Stranger in the Land," in *Broken Roots: A Collection of Stories*, Vantage Press, 1990): 63-73.

Saúl Sosnowski, "Latin American-Jewish Writers: Protecting the Hyphen." In Elkin and Merkx, *The Jewish Presence in Latin America*, 297-307

### **February 11: A Tribe to be Saved: "Castro's Jews"**

Larry Luxner, "Castro's Jews," *B'nai Brith International Jewish Monthly* (December 1992-January 1993): 9-15.

Ilene Goldman, "Documentaries about Jewish Renewal in Contemporary Cuba: Hope or Hype?" *Latin American Research Review* 32, 3 (1997): 258-268.

Kerri P. Steinberg, "Contesting Identities in Jewish Philanthropy," in *Diasporas and Exiles: Varieties of Jewish Identity*, edited by Howard Wettstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002): 253-278.

Arturo López Levy, "The Jewish Community in Cuba in the 1990s," in *Religion, Culture, and Society: The Case of Cuba*, edited by Margaret Crahan (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2003): 79-89.

Dana Evan Kaplan, "The Future of Religious Life in Communist Cuba," *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly* (2001): 38-46.

Dana Evan Kaplan, "Fidel and the Jews," *Moment* (August 2004): 37-45; 83-93.

Steven Gutkin, "Jews in Cuba," *Huntsville Times*, April 1, 2000: D1-2.

James Colbert, "Breaking Through the Wall: Letter from Santiago," *Hadassah Magazine*, January 2004: 13-15.

Ben G. Frank, "Havana," *Hadassah Magazine*, January 2005: 52-57.

\*\*\*\*FILM: Laura Paull and Evan Garelle, *Havana Nagila: The Jews in Cuba* (1995)

### **Recommended:**

Special issue, "The Jews of Cuba," *Jewish Renaissance*, October 2005: 14-22.

Ana Dopico, "Picturing Havana: History, Vision, and the Scramble for Cuba," *Nepantla: Views from the South* 3, 3 (2002): 451-493.

Raul Rubio, "Materializing Havana and Revolution: Cuban Material Culture," *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, 24 (2005): 161-177.

### **February 18: Searching for Sephardic Traces**

Ilan Stavans, ed., "Introduction: In the Chameleon's Path," *The Scroll and the Cross: A Thousand Years of Jewish-Hispanic Literature*,

Jane S. Gerber, *The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience*. New York: Free Press, 1994, ix-xxv and 254-283.

Ruth Behar, "A Sephardi Air," in *Taking Root: Narratives of Jewish Women in Latin America* edited by Marjorie Agosin (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002) 12-15.

Ruth Behar, "While Waiting for the Ferry to Cuba: Afterthoughts about *Adio Kerida*," *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 41 (4), fall 2002: 651-667.

Margaret Mead, "Visual Anthropology in a Discipline of Words," in *Principles of Visual Anthropology*, edited by Paul Hockings (Mouton, 1995): 3-10.

Diane Kaufmann Tobin, Gary A. Tobin, and Scott Rubin, with foreword by Lewis Gordon, *In Every Tongue: The Racial and Ethnic Diversity of the Jewish People* (San Francisco: Institute for Jewish and Community Research, 2005), selections.

\*\*\*FILM: Ruth Behar, *Adio Kerida/Goodbye Dear Love: A Cuban Sephardic Journey* (2002)

**Recommended:**

Ella Shohat, "Taboo Memories, Diasporic Visions: Columbus, Palestine, and Arab-Jews" 201-232.

Susan A. Glenn, "In the blood? Consent, descent, and the ironies of Jewish identity." *Jewish Social Studies*, Winter-Spring 2002, pp. 139-152.

**February 25: Theories of Diaspora, New Jews, and the Jewish Closet in Anthropology**

James Clifford, "Diasporas," Chapter 10 in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997): 244-277.

Caryn Aviv and David Shneer, *New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora* (New York University Press, Preface and Introduction, xiii-xvi; 1-25.

Virginia R. Dominguez, "Questioning Jews," *American Ethnologist* 20, 3 (August 1993): 618-624.

Gelya Frank, "Jews, Multiculturalism, and Boasian Anthropology," *American Anthropologist* 99, 4 (December, 1997): 731-745.

Jeffrey D. Feldman, "The Jewish Roots and Routes of Anthropology," *Anthropological Quarterly*, 77, 1 (Winter 2004): 107-125.

**Please note:** At 5pm we will attend as a class the lecture by Natalie Zemon Davis, "Joanna, Stedman, and the Knot of Slavery," at the Sue and Leonard Miller Center for Contemporary Jewish Studies.

**Recommended:**

Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, "Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity," *Critical Inquiry*, 19, 4 (Summer 1993): 693-725.

Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora: Two Essays on the Relevance of Jewish Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, Preface and Introduction, vii-ix; 1-33.

Ulf Hannerz, "Where We Are and Who We Want to Be," in *The Postnational Self: Belonging and Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002): 217-232.

PROSPECTUS FOR FINAL PROJECT DUE ON FEBRUARY 25.

**March 3: An Imaginary Homeland: Returning to Jewish Cuba**

Salman Rushdie, "Imaginary Homelands," in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981-1991*. (London: Granta Books, 1991): 9-21.

Ruth Behar, *An Island Called Home: Returning to Jewish Cuba*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007).

Ruth Behar, "Juban América," *Poetics Today* 16 (1), spring 1995: 151-170.

**Recommended:**

Ruth Behar, "Ethnography and the book that was lost," *Ethnography* 4, 1 (2003): 15-39.

Maritza Corrales, *The Chosen Island: Jews in Cuba* (Chicago: Salsedo Press, 2005).

FIRST PAPER DUE ON MARCH 7.

**March 10: Spring break**

**March 17. How Jewish Cubans Became Jubans in Miami**

Caroline Bettinger-López, *Jewish-Cuban Journeys*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000).

**March 24: Refugee/Exile/Immigrant: Between Jewish and Cuban Diasporas**

Deborah Dash Moore, *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A.* (New York: Free Press, 1994): Chapter 1, pp. 1-20; Chapter 3, pp. 53-92.

Silvia Pedraza, "Cuba's Refugees: Manifold Migrations" in *Origins and Destinies: Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in America*, edited by Silvia Pedraza and Rubén Rumbaut (Wadsworth Publishing, 1996): 263-279.

Carl Shrag, "Two-Hyphen Identity: Letter from Miami," *Hadassah Magazine*, January 2004: 10-12

Mirta Ojito, "Bernardo Benes: Our Man in Miami," in *Finding Mañana: A Memoir of a Cuban Exodus* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005): 37-56.

\*\*\*\*FILM: Rhonda L. Mitrani, "Cuba Mia" (2002)

**Recommended:**

Guillermo J. Grenier and Lisandro Pérez, *The Legacy of Exile: Cubans in the United States* (Pearson Education, 2003).

Gaye Tuchman and Harry G. Levine, "'Safe Treyf': New York Jews and Chinese Food," *Contemporary Ethnography*, 22, 3 (1992): 163-184.

**March 31: Jewish/Cuban/American: Poetry of Identity**

José Kozer, *Stet: Selected Poems* (Junction Press, 2006), selection.

José Kozer, "Exile and Bouganvilia," forthcoming in Ruth Behar and Lucía Suárez, eds., *The Portable Island: Cubans at Home in the World* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

Ester Rebeca Shapiro Rok, "Santería as a Healing Practice in Diaspora Communities: My Cuban Jewish Journey with Oshún," in Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, eds., *Healing Cultures: Art and Religion as Curative Practices in the Caribbean and Its Diaspora* (New York: Palgrave, 2001): 69-87.

\*\*\*\*FILM: Joycelyn Bejar, "Cuba: Beyond the Pearl of the Antilles" (2005)

**Recommended:**

Jacobo Sefamí, "The Family, the World: The Poetry of José Kozer" in *Tradition and Innovation: Reflections on Latin American Jewish Writing*, edited by Robert DiAntonio and Nora Glickman (State University of New York Press, 1993): 201-209.

SECOND PAPER DUE ON APRIL 4.

***April 7: Research and Writing Sessions***

Theodore A. Rees Cheney, *Writing Creative Nonfiction: Fiction Techniques for Crafting Great Nonfiction*. Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2001.

**Recommended:**

Barbara Myerhoff, *Number Our Days* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978) Chapters 1-2, pp. 1-78.

***April 14: Research and Writing Sessions***

Theodore A. Rees Cheney, *Writing Creative Nonfiction: Fiction Techniques for Crafting Great Nonfiction*. Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2001.

**Recommended:**

Barbara Tedlock, "From Participant Observation to the Observation of Participation: The Emergence of Narrative Ethnography," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 47, 1 (Spring 1991): 69-94.

***April 21: Last class, Presentation of final projects.***

**Films on Cuban Jews**



Robert Levine and Mark D. Szuchman, *Hotel Cuba: A Historical Diary of the Pre-Castro Jewish Experience* (1984)

(Read about the reaction to the film--<http://www.jewishcuba.org/hotel.htm>)

Laura Paull and Evan Garelle, *Havana Nagila: The Jews in Cuba* (1995)

Ruth Behar, *Adio Kerida/Goodbye Dear Love: A Cuban Sephardic Journey* (2002)

Rhonda L. Mitrani, *Cuba Mía* (2002)

Joycelyn Bejar, *Cuba: Beyond the Pearl of the Antilles* (2005)

Lourdes Albo, *Que puedo yo contar de mi vida?* (2006)

### **Recommended Ethnographic Films on American Jews**

Barbara Myerhoff, *Number Our Days* (1977)

Barbara Myerhoff, *In Her Own Time* (1985)

### **Synagogues Founded and/or Attended by Cuban Jews in Miami**

Temple Beth Shmuel - Cuban Hebrew Congregation

Temple Moses - Sephardic Congregation of South Florida ([www.templemoses.com](http://www.templemoses.com))

Temple Menorah ([www.templemenorahmiami.org](http://www.templemenorahmiami.org))

The Shul of Bal Harbour ([www.theshul.org](http://www.theshul.org))

### **Web Sites**

<http://www.utexas.edu/cola/orgs/lajsa/resources/> (Latin American Jewish Studies Association)

[www.thecajm.org](http://www.thecajm.org) (Cuban-American Jewish Mission)

[www.jewishcuba.org](http://www.jewishcuba.org)

[www.jewishmiami.org](http://www.jewishmiami.org)

[www.granma.cu/ingles/index.html](http://www.granma.cu/ingles/index.html) (Cuba's daily newspaper in English)

[www.granma.cubaweb.cu](http://www.granma.cubaweb.cu) (Cuba's daily newspaper in Spanish)

[www.jrebelde.cubaweb.cu](http://www.jrebelde.cubaweb.cu) (Juventud Rebelde, youth-oriented Cuban newspaper)

[www.eleconomista.cubaweb.cu](http://www.eleconomista.cubaweb.cu)

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/CubaNews/> (provides texts of Cuban documents, Fidel Castro's speeches, and latest news about Cuba)

<http://cubacontact.fiu.edu> (provides list of U.S. nonprofit organizations that have worked on Cuba and/or with Cuban institutions)

<http://cuba.iccas.miami.edu> (Cuba On-Line database provided by University of Miami)

[www.cubatrade.org](http://www.cubatrade.org) (U.S. government view on Cuba issues, including travel)

[www.globalexchange.org](http://www.globalexchange.org) (specializes in educational and volunteer visits to Cuba)

[www.afrocubaweb.com](http://www.afrocubaweb.com)

[www.cubanismo.com](http://www.cubanismo.com) (Cuban art)

[www.cubaencuentro.comunidad](http://www.cubaencuentro.comunidad) (Spain-based online magazine on Cuban culture, politics, and literature)