

## *From All Their Habitations*

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### *A Jewish Renaissance in Castro's Cuba*

DANA EVAN KAPLAN

CUBA IS A COUNTRY VISITED BY RELATIVELY FEW AMERICANS.

Despite the fact that it is only 90 miles south of Key West, Florida, there are severe restrictions placed on Americans who would like to visit the country. The Clinton administration has recently moved to liberalize some of these limitations, and it is possible for groups on cultural or educational missions to visit the country legally. According to the current law, it remains illegal for most Americans to spend money in the country. Nevertheless, a large and growing number of Americans ignore the ban and visit illegally.

Although we think of it as one large island, the country is actually an archipelago with more than four thousand islands and cays. Most of the population lives on the large main island, which stretches from east to west. There are fields of sugar cane that stretch for miles, large patches of tobacco plants, and all sorts of semi-tropical fruits and vegetables, including some of the tastiest papaya in the world, and glistening white sand beaches dotted with coconut palm trees flanking bright blue water as far as the eye can see.

It would not be an exaggeration to call it a tropical paradise. And yet, as we all know, there are troubles in this paradise. Even so, Jews continue to live here. Let me describe the Jewish community of Cuba today, gleaned from two recent visits, and put contemporary events in the context of the historical background of the past four decades.

#### **A Brief Historical Perspective**

Most Jewish immigrants came to Cuba in the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Many were Sephardim from the Ottoman Empire, as well as Egypt, Algeria, Syria, and other Middle Eastern and Asian countries. Some settled in Havana, but others established homes in other areas, such as Camaguey, Santiago de Cuba, and Santa Clara.<sup>2</sup> The Jewish community in the provinces was heavily Sephardic historically, and today is almost entirely of Sephardic origin. There were also Ashkenazim who arrived from Eastern Europe; about two-thirds were from

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Poland with others from Russia and Rumania. Most established small businesses. Many of them began working as manual laborers and then opened up small stores in Havana once they had saved up some money. The more successful were eventually able to move into wholesaling, and some became quite affluent.<sup>3</sup>

Many of the Jewish immigrants to Cuba—particularly the Ashkenazim—saw their time in Cuba as a temporary stopover on their way to the United States. After 1921, and even more so after 1924, there were immigration restrictions placed on Jews trying to enter the United States; many Jews eager to leave Eastern Europe felt it was better to emigrate to Cuba where they would be close to America and would be able eventually to move to the United States. Many hoped to receive legal visas, while others believed that it would be possible to enter the United States illegally, either directly from Cuba or across the Mexican border into Texas or California. Some refer to their stay in Havana as “Hotel Cuba,” indicating that they never believed that the island was their home.

American Jews also came to Cuba in the aftermath of the 1898 Spanish-Cuban-American War. When the hostilities ended, a United States military occupation began, which lasted for four years. This coincided with the dramatic escalation of American business activities in Cuba, and numerous Americans, including Jews, came to the island looking for economic opportunities. The 1898 intervention in Cuba laid a solid basis for American control of the Cuban economy that would last until 1959.<sup>4</sup>

By the early 1950s as many as fifteen thousand Jews may have been living in Cuba. They enjoyed an unprecedented affluence and stability. Many moved out of Old Havana to the suburbs of Vedado and later to Miramar. Many of the somewhat less affluent *Yiddishists* settled in Santos Suarez. The affluent Jews in the Vedado area wanted a community center close to their homes, and so a collective of wealthy businessmen called the *Patronato*—the Patrons, or Benefactors—donated money for a center to be erected in Vedado. Completed in 1953, the new center was called the *Patronato de la Casa de la Comunidad Hebrea de Cuba*. Attached to the community center was a synagogue, *Bet ha-Keneset ha-Gadol*, the Great Synagogue.

The *Patronato* was built over the opposition of the established Jewish leadership in *Habana Vieja* (Old Havana), but this was of no concern to the newly affluent suburban leaders, who had been able to raise between \$750,000 and \$1 million for the construction of the center. The membership was just short of one thousand families, mostly Ashkenazim who formerly belonged to the *Centro Israelita* in Old Havana. There were also some Sephardim, American, and Central European Jews. In the midst of the building and planning, few were aware of the revolution that was almost at their doorsteps. No one anticipated that their thriving communal life would come crashing to a halt at the end of the decade.

American Jews established the United Hebrew Congregation, also called Temple Beth Israel, in Vedado. Its founders were looking for a Reform service similar to what they had known. By the 1940s, however, substantial numbers of German-speaking Central European refugees had joined the congregation. Both Americans and Germans wanted to have services in their own languages, so there

were English-language services one week and German-language services the next. In 1914, a group of Turkish Jews founded *Khevet Achim*, the Sephardic congregation in Old Havana. The synagogue was closed recently because of structural problems as well as the dwindling size of the congregation. Most of the Jews had long ago moved to the suburbs; the Ashkenazi synagogue still in Old Havana is more than sufficient to serve the remaining Jews.

Most of the Sephardic Jews who had belonged to *Khevet Achim* have joined the *Centro Sefaradi* in Vedado. Nevertheless, Jewish communal leaders are eager to make sure *Khevet Achim* remains within the Jewish community and is not turned over to the government. Joseph Levy of the *Centro Sefaradi* in Vedado told me that he hopes the building will be turned into a museum of Cuban Jewish life. Of the *Khevet Achim* building Levy said, "Inside these walls the Sephardic Jews lived the best years of their lives."<sup>5</sup> But now the *Centro Sefaradi* is the sole remaining Sephardic congregation in Havana.

The *Patronato*, also located in Vedado, is the most active of the three remaining congregations and attracts most of the younger people. In 1956, the Orthodox Synagogue *Adath Israel* built a new building in Old Havana. After the 1959 Revolution, all building projects ended and most Jews made plans to emigrate. Today the congregations are rebuilding their organizations as well as their synagogues.

### **The Decline of the Jewish Community after the Revolution**

The Havana Jewish community was becoming quite prosperous when Fidel Castro seized power on New Year's Day 1959. Since most Jews were store owners and small businessmen, the government's policy of confiscating private property—and particularly businesses—hurt them badly. The community began a precipitous decline. Following the Revolution, and the accompanying upheaval, the majority of the Jewish community emigrated from Cuba, including most of the community's leaders. Since Florida was only ninety miles away, this was a logical destination for many. Some went to Puerto Rico, which had many of the same topological as well as cultural features as Cuba and was an American protectorate and American territory. Others went to Mexico, Venezuela, other Central and South American countries, or Spain. Some made Aliyah to Israel.

By 1963 about 70% of the Jewish population had left. Because of the government's negative view of religious affiliation, many of the Jews that remained in the Havana area avoided any active affiliation. According to one estimate, by 1990 only 305 identifiable Jewish families remained in Cuba. The Jewish community in Havana was able to keep three of its five congregations running, but the level of activity was extremely low and the participants were mostly elderly. Until the early 1990s, the last *Bar Mitzvah* was celebrated in Havana in 1973 and the last Jewish wedding in 1976.<sup>6</sup>

But even during the 1970s, there were still visitors from abroad and North America. The Canadian government had never broken off diplomatic relations with Cuba, and so Canadians were able to visit. There were even special permits

issued for visitors from the United States. Some of these Americans—not only Jews—visited the Cuban Jewish community. Congressmen Frederick W. Richmond of Brooklyn and Richard W. Nolan of Minnesota visited the *Patronato* on the first night of *Hanukkah* in 1977. The Congressmen came away with the impression that life was hard for the Jews there but that they were not being persecuted for their religious beliefs any more than members of any other religion.<sup>7</sup> Even so, economic conditions made life extremely difficult.

As the numbers of Jews in Havana continued to decline, the condition of the synagogue buildings deteriorated. The most extreme case was that of the United Hebrew Congregation. This temple had formerly been the most elite Jewish congregation in all of Cuba. Now it lay in ruins. But in order to avoid handing over the property to the government the Jewish community maintained an active organization on paper. Other synagogue buildings were also in drastic need of repairs. The *Patronato* had a leaking roof and was riddled with termites. Skeletal remains of dead birds that had fallen from nests in the rafters lay on the floor of the main sanctuary. According to one estimate, the building needed \$50,000 just for basic repairs.<sup>8</sup> As a result, it was thought prudent to remove the Torah scrolls from the Ark to prevent damage to them. The *Patronato* had severe budgetary problems and so decided to sell a part of the community center section of the building to the government in 1981. *Adath Israel* was in somewhat better shape than the *Patronato* but it had also deteriorated greatly. Both congregations moved their services to small chapels that were easier to maintain and were more appropriate for the small number of worshippers. The congregations struggled to find enough people for daily *Minyan*, so the *Patronato* and the *Centro Sefaradi* began limiting services to Friday nights and Saturday mornings.

A small number of Jews had decided to remain in the country. Some had elderly parents or other close relatives who needed their care. Others were elderly members of *Adath Israel*, the Orthodox congregation in *Habaña Vieja*, and resisted leaving the graves of their loved ones in the Jewish cemetery. Others had salaried employment that was not adversely affected by the Revolution, or were promoted into positions of greater—rather than lesser—responsibility. Some may have feared the daunting task of resettling into a foreign country, perhaps for a second or even a third time. Some were ideologically committed to the Revolution. Finally it seems that those who were intermarried were more likely to stay than those who were not. They would be understandably reluctant to leave their families behind, knowing that they would very likely never see them again.

### **The Attitude of the Castro Government towards the Jews**

When Castro overthrew the Batista regime most Jews, like most Cubans, were euphoric. Very few were affected by the revolutionary trials that were held in the months following the Revolution, since almost none had been involved in political life under Batista. While there were American Jewish gangsters, such as Meyer Lansky, who had been involved with Batista in the development of casino gambling, none were arrested or put on trial. When Lansky's Havana Riviera Hotel

was officially confiscated on October 24, 1960, no one suggested that the Communists had antisemitic motives. One reason was that 165 other American enterprises, including the Cuban subsidiaries and franchises of Goodyear, Westinghouse, Kodak, Woolworth's, and Canada Dry, were also seized.<sup>10</sup>

Scholars have stressed that the Jews who left did not do so because they felt they had to flee religious persecution. Rather, they wanted to escape from a socialist or communist economic system that had confiscated their businesses and would not allow them the economic latitude they needed in order to fulfill their economic aspirations.

Even during the revolutionary government's anti-religious campaign, Castro bent over backwards not to persecute Jews. He declared an official three-day period of mourning in late April 1963 when news came of the death of Israeli president Yitzhak Ben-Zvi. Algeria's Mohammed Ben Bella supposedly rescinded an invitation to Castro because of this action. Associations with the Jewish community at the outset reflected Batista's: warm, friendly, protectively guaranteeing the right of minorities to practice their religions without interference. Jews and other religious minorities, including worshippers of African deities (*santeros*), suddenly found themselves, in official rhetoric, treated as "hothouse flowers," exhibited as examples of religious freedom under socialism. All five synagogues continued to function, although most of their members flocked into exile; no property was taken; and Jewish religious and communal buildings as well as cemeteries were extended maintenance by the state, although, like most public buildings in Cuba, they were allowed to decay.<sup>11</sup>

Kosher butchers were among the only private businesses not nationalized by the government, and Jews were allowed additional meat and poultry to compensate them for the fact that they did not eat pork.

Those who left stressed that antisemitism was not a reason for their departure, and that remains the impression of those who stayed behind. The country has had many problems, and Cuban Jews have suffered along with the rest of the population. But the Jews with whom I spoke stressed that their treatment by the government is no better or worse than that of other Cubans. The authorities went to considerable efforts to avoid any action that could have been construed as antisemitic or as condoning or encouraging antisemitism. The Castro regime felt that it would generate additional hostility were it to be perceived as persecuting a small and vulnerable religious minority group. Yet it is hard to believe that the same government that was so willing to antagonize their very powerful neighbor to the north feared the fallout from the treatment that they might give to such a small group. In the early years many Cubans felt that both Cuba and Israel were small, struggling, Socialist states overwhelmed by much larger and stronger enemies. Many Cubans had a great deal of humanitarian sympathy for the tremendous suffering that the Jews had endured in the Holocaust.<sup>12</sup>

Today the relations between the government and the local Jewish community seem to be civil and even warm. The fact that the Cuban government was a

leading propagandist for anti-Zionist sentiment seems to have been forgiven, if not forgotten. Margalit Bejarano told *The London Sunday Telegraph* that there is far less antisemitism in Cuba today than in the former Communist states of Eastern Europe. Although the practice of religion in Cuba could restrict one's entry into certain professions before the policy reversal of the early 1990s, "Castro never denied Jews kosher food or the right to organize cultural activities."<sup>13</sup> And yet the radical anti-Zionist position that the government took made it very difficult for the Jews to feel close to the Castro regime. Relations between the government and the Jewish community began to fray as early as the 1960s and 1970s, as the Cuban government took an increasingly pro-Palestinian position.<sup>14</sup> Today, relations appear to be relatively good.

Most Jews did not actively participate in the Revolution. One obvious explanation is that most were businessmen who were not in favor of Castro's Communism. But this is not the whole story, since Castro did not become an overt Communist until some time after he took power. During the years of revolutionary struggle the vast majority of Cubans believed Castro was fighting to overthrow a corrupt dictatorship, rather than to institute a totalitarian Communist regime. Adela Dworin, today the Vice President of the *Patronato*, suggests instead that most Cuban Jews were still in the process of acclimating themselves to Cuban society. While they, like other Cubans, realized that Batista's government was extremely corrupt, they did not yet have enough confidence in their place in the country to fight for radical change.<sup>15</sup>

### **A Dramatic Religious Revival in Castro's Cuba**

Contrary to the assumptions held by many people, religious affiliation or religious activity was never banned outright by the Communist government. Nevertheless, it was viewed with disfavor by the authorities, and Cubans felt that their identification with church or synagogue could stigmatize them and negatively affect their chances for promotion and other career opportunities. So it was a dramatic change in November 1991 when the Cuban Communist Party repealed a ban on religious involvement for party members. In July 1992, further changes were made to allow for room for religion within the Cuban educational system and society as a whole.<sup>16</sup>

These policy changes, as well as other events—such as Pope John Paul II's 1998 visit to Cuba—produced a change in the Cubans' view of religious organizations. Various Christian churches began to grow exponentially, and numerous journalists reported on the return to religious faith. The government relaxed its all-pervasive reach and has accepted religious commitment and activity. More Cubans took advantage of the opportunity to attend services and study religion.

There is no question that there has been a dramatic upsurge in religious life in Cuba. As one indication of this, baptisms have increased from 25,258 in 1979 to 50,979 in 1990 and 62,664 in 1992.<sup>17</sup> In the decades following the 1959 Revolution most churches became accustomed to seeing a relatively constant decline in membership. Many of the most devoted church members left the country in the early years of the Revolution, fearful of religious intolerance. Those

who remained often distanced themselves to avoid jeopardizing their economic status. That is now in the past. Although some of the “new faithful” are returning to the church they were raised in, many were atheists with no history of church involvement.<sup>18</sup>

There are many explanations given for this return to religion. Tom Masland of *Newsweek* Magazine has suggested that the “*Período Especial*,” the “Special Period,”<sup>19</sup> with its losses and deprivations, created a “massive loss of faith in government.”<sup>20</sup> For decades Castro urged people to believe in the Revolution, but today few people take Communism seriously. As a consequence of the existential void that has been created, Cubans are looking for something in which to believe. They are also looking for roots and trying to develop a sense of identity as revolutionary fervor wanes. Religion fills much of this void and both Catholic and Protestant denominations have seen a rapid increase in interest and memberships.

On a practical level, Christian churches are able to bring in humanitarian aid. Functioning as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), these churches are exempted from American restrictions on activities in Cuba. During the 1990s church organizations were some of the most effective aid organizations in Havana and the rest of the country. Synagogues worked with American Jewish groups to build comparable aid efforts for Cuban Jews and therefore built a similar dynamic. A second reason that is not usually mentioned but which I believe has some relevance is that there is so little to do in Communist Cuba. Money is scarce, and there are no multiplex cinemas, no Disney theme parks, and no Malls of America. Churches and synagogues provide a place to meet, mingle, and be entertained. They offer classes, services, and even festive dinners. In a country with so little, religious organizations provide a lot.

### **A Jewish Renaissance**

Many of the Jewish communities in former Communist countries are undergoing revivals. The Cuban Jewish revival is a part of this pattern. Jorge Diener, former coordinator of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) programs in Cuba, states that the Cuban Jewish community was “almost dying . . . [now it is] alive and strong in its potential.”<sup>21</sup> Over the past several years the Cuban Jewish community has undergone a complete transformation, a “change from a culture of survival to a culture of community.”<sup>22</sup>

The renaissance of Jewish life in the 1990s is also remarkable in light of the atrophy the community experienced from the early 1960s until the end of the 1980s. Each of the four synagogues in Havana had a core of elderly people who were retired or toward the end of their careers, and so were not overly concerned about career advancement. Many had strong memories of their immigrant parents or their own upbringing in traditional Jewish societies. In any case they built a strong support group in their congregations. But the synagogues were suffering from pervasive apathy and most Jews were not interested in Judaism. No one expected the situation to change, yet at the beginning of the 1990s that is exactly what happened. For the same reasons that nominal Christians began to explore

Christianity, many Jews started coming to the synagogues, often for the first time. Most of them knew almost nothing about Judaism. Many had not even been told as children that they were of Jewish ancestry and had only discovered this on their own.<sup>23</sup> The revival has dramatically transformed Jewish life in the country. Youth groups are being re-established, and Sunday schools have been started or expanded. Jewish women's organizations, B'nai B'rith lodges, and senior citizens groups are now common.

The Jewish community in Havana began to undergo a visible revitalization in 1991 as a direct result of the government's policy shift on religion. Rather than being an officially atheist country which actively discouraged religious affiliation, the state became officially secular. A series of other changes occurred which encouraged Cubans of all types to re-engage their religious pasts or find a new religious tradition and from that time on there was a steady stream of Jews and part-Jews approaching synagogues.

Obviously, many of the Sephardim gravitated towards the *Centro Sefaradi*. The younger people preferred the *Patronato*, where more activities were geared toward youth and young adults. But denominational affiliation did not seem to play a decisive role in the decision of where to reaffiliate. *Adath Israel* was Orthodox and remained so, but their Executive Director told me three months ago that approximately 90% of its congregants were intermarried "just like everywhere else."<sup>24</sup>

Despite the resurgent interest in Judaism, there was still no money available in the Jewish community to undertake the necessary renovations. But because of the tremendous publicity generated by the rediscovery of the Cuban Jewish community, the American Joint Distribution Committee allied with the South Florida Federation in Miami to fund the renovation of the *Patronato* synagogue. Architect Sara Blumenkrantz drew up architectural plans for the renovation, scheduled to be completed this year.

*Adath Israel* is located in the middle of *Habana Vieja*, the old city, which is defined by the limits of the early colonial settlement. The area is the primary tourist attraction in the country and restoring it is an important governmental priority. In 1977 the Cuban government named *Habana Vieja* a national monument, and UNESCO declared *Habana Vieja* a world heritage site. In 1978, the government accepted a plan presented by city historian Eusebio Leal Spengler to renovate the entire area. The plan concentrates on the five squares of Old Havana: *Plaza de Armas*, *Plaza de Catedral*, *Plaza Vieja*, *Plaza de San Francisco*, and *Plaza del Cristo*. Some of the more important buildings have been completely renovated while others have been given only exterior cleaning and painting. The "special period" has threatened the renovation plans because there is far less money available than anticipated and building materials as well are in short supply. Nevertheless, projects proceed because of *Habana Vieja*'s importance to the Cuban economy, which has come to depend more and more on the income generated by tourism.<sup>25</sup>

The Havana Restoration Commission worked with architecture student Jorge Herrera to design plans for the restoration of *Adath Israel*. Herrera was



sent to Germany on an architectural scholarship where he studied the architecture of German synagogues. Upon his return he collaborated with members of *Adath Israel* to develop the Synagogue Restoration Plan. This includes a full restoration of the sanctuary as well as a number of innovative features including a *Sukkah* frame for the roof of the building, to be used to erect a *Sukkah* during the holiday of *Sukkot*. The government contributed part of the cost for the renovation, with the bulk of the money being donated by a number of rich Orthodox businessmen from Panama and Venezuela.<sup>26</sup>

During the early years of the revival there were a number of visitors from abroad, including the United States and Canada, as well as Jews from Central and South America. One of the most influential was Rabbi Shmuel Szteinhendler, who during the 1990s made four trips a year to Cuba from his congregational base in Guadalajara, Mexico. Szteinhendler, an Argentinean-born Conservative rabbi trained in Buenos Aires, conducted services not only in the *Patronato* but also at congregations throughout the country. He also officiated at life-cycle events including ritual circumcisions and weddings. One of his most important tasks was helping to organize *Batei Din* for the conversion of many of those who had returned to Judaism, and had some Jewish ancestry, but were not halakhically Jewish.

### **The Revival in Santiago de Cuba**

The rebuilding of Jewish life has not been restricted to Havana. Jewish communities throughout the country have noted substantially increased levels of activity. This is certainly the case in Santiago de Cuba, the second largest city in the country.

Santiago de Cuba is regarded as the most Caribbean of all of Cuba's cities. The population is more *mulatto* than in Havana and other Cuban cities. Local residents are proud of the role that the city played in the Revolution. It was here that Castro staged his attack on the Moncada barracks, and posters along the roads proclaim Santiago the "Hero City" and the "cradle of the Revolution."

Throughout Cuba Jews are referred to by their country of origin. Although most came from the Turkish Empire, there were a number of Ashkenazi families from Poland, who succeeded in gaining admission to Cuba before World War II. Perhaps because they were more visible than the Turkish Jews, Cubans began referring to all Jews as "Polacos," or Poles. Others confused the Sephardic Jews with Christian immigrants from the Turkish lands, or even Muslims, and so referred to the Jews as "Turcos," or more frequently "Moros," or Moors. In Santa Clara, the Jewish cemetery is called *El Cementerio de los Sirios*, the Syrian cemetery, because the local Cubans regarded all immigrants from Turkish or Arab countries as Moors or Syrians.<sup>27</sup>

The *Sociedad Unión Israelita del Oriente de Cuba*, the Jewish society of Eastern Cuba, was originally founded in October 1924. The community held services in rented quarters until 1939, when a synagogue building was erected. From that time on it was referred to as the *Sínogoga de Santiago de Cuba*, the Synagogue of Santiago de Cuba. The congregation had two spiritual leaders, both of whom served for roughly twenty years each. The first was el Señor Isaac Chiprut Confi, who served

from 1924 until 1943, and the second was el Señor Victor Farin Sarfati, whose leadership extended from 1946 until 1967. The Revolution occurred during Sarfati's term, and the community's level of activity dropped dramatically after 1959 as a result. Most of the local Jews emigrated either during the Revolution or in the years immediately after it. It appeared that the community was destined to disappear.

By 1980 the local Jewish community had become completely inactive and the synagogue building was not being used, and the government confiscated it for other purposes. This did not happen in Havana where the Jewish population was larger and was able to keep major Jewish institutions running, if only marginally.

But a small number of Jews had remained in the Santiago area. Although most had intermarried, many retained some interest in their ancestral traditions. At Passover each year the Santiago Jews would gather to receive a package from Canada forwarded from the Havana Jewish community. This package contained kosher wine, matzot, matzah flour, tea, tuna, and even meat. The annual receipt of this aid package made quite an impression on the remaining Santiago Jews because it showed them that there was a Jewish presence and worldwide sense of solidarity with them.

In October 1993 the Santiago community began reorganizing after about fifteen years of almost total inactivity. From October 1993 until July 1995, Jewish communal activities were held on a regular basis in the home of Rebeca Botton Behar, who became the president of the newly emerging Jewish community. Like other small Jewish communities without synagogue buildings of their own, the Jews of Santiago de Cuba met in a private home to celebrate holidays together. The government now agreed to return the confiscated synagogue to the Jewish community and the synagogue was rededicated in a joyous ceremony held on July 25, 1995. Adding to the festive atmosphere was the fact that the rededication ceremony coincided with the 480th anniversary of the founding of the city. Rabbi Shmuel Sztainhendler officiated at the rededication. Today the congregation has an active schedule of Sabbath services and has reopened the Hebrew school for the teaching of Jewish traditions and practices. After the Saturday morning service, a Kiddush lunch is offered for the entire congregation and a study session on the Torah portion of the week is taught in Spanish. Two separate Jewish dance groups have been created and they perform a wide repertoire of Israeli folk dances. A children's troupe called *Etzim Ktanim*, "little trees," has been established, as well as a group called *Atideinu*, "our future."

In 1996 a visiting rabbi from Chile officiated at a double *bar mitzvah* ceremony for two cousins, Robertito Novoa Bonne and Andresito Novoa Castiel. A month later, Rabbi Stuart Kelman of Congregation Netivot Shalom of Berkeley, California came to Santiago for a second double *bar mitzvah* ceremony. The double *bar mitzvahs* were the first ones held in the city for almost twenty years, and most of the members of the Jewish community attended the ceremonies.<sup>28</sup> Upon his return to Berkeley Kelman stated that "these are people coming back to Judaism with enthusiasm and passion."<sup>29</sup>

One young Cuban who has re-embraced his Jewish identity is Eitan Behar. At the time of his birth in October 1972 in Santiago, no organized Jewish community remained in the city. Like most descendants of Jews in the Santiago community, Eitan's parents were intermarried. His mother's family came from Turkey, and his father's grandparents were Catholics from Spain. Yet, he writes, "I knew I was a Jew." Much of this Jewish identity took the form of a visceral identification with Zionism, a deeply problematic political loyalty in pro-Palestinian, anti-Zionist Cuba. Eitan recalls, "I had a small flag of Israel, and my mother was afraid of it. I loved to wear it all the time. But Cuba is [was] a pro-Palestinian country, and Israel was directly [connected to the UN resolution] 'Zionism equals racism.' So my ideology could be [criticized] for wearing such a symbol of racism. I remember a few very good teachers in high school who told me, 'Do you know what is the meaning of this flag?' When I said, 'Yes,' they answered, 'You should be proud of it.'"<sup>30</sup> Both the Batista and the early Castro regimes formerly considered Israel a small country struggling for freedom just like Cuba. But once Castro formed an alliance with the Soviet Union, the official line on the State of Israel changed dramatically. Yet Eitan felt that most Cubans in Santiago continued to feel a great deal of respect for Israel, remembering it as "the country that plants flowers in the desert."

Eitan confirms that when he was growing up religion in Cuba was not persecuted per se, but everyone knew that the government supported atheism and the doctrine that religion was the opiate of the people. Education was Marxist-Communist and most people were afraid publicly to practice any kind of religion. Eitan described the situation as he experienced it in Santiago, but it was true for the entire country. Most people stopped going to their churches or synagogues. Yet a large percentage of Cubans kept their beliefs. As Eitan told me, "You can change a government, but you cannot change people's belief in a couple of years."<sup>31</sup> So most Cubans retained some type of faith in their home but avoided any public demonstration of that faith.

### **Rededicating the Synagogue in Camaguey**

Camaguey is the provincial capital of Camaguey, the largest province in Cuba. Camaguey Province has a reputation as a tough cowboy type of area. It has immense flatlands of sugarcane and great numbers of grazing cattle. The original city was founded in 1514 on the coast, but after almost continuous attacks from pirates it was moved inland in 1528. Camaguey became known as a center for the marketing of contraband livestock to several nearby Caribbean islands that were settled by the French, Dutch, and English. But this economic success again attracted the attention of the pirates, and in 1668 the English pirate Henry Morgan looted the city.

Another major pirate attack occurred about a decade later. As a consequence, the fear of pirates is visible in Camaguey's early colonial architecture. A network of winding streets that form a labyrinth surrounds the inner core of the city. There are many blind alleys and forked streets that lead to squares of different sizes. There is

only one exit from the city; should pirates ever return and succeed in entering the city, the hope was that the local inhabitants would be able to entrap and kill them.

There were two separate synagogues in Camaguey, both built in the 1920s. Both *Congregation Shevet Achim* and *Congregation Tiferet Israel* were Sephardic. Both were closed down after the Revolution. In 1942 a society named the *Centro Israelita de Camaguey* was established. Most of its members were Ashkenazim, although it was not officially an Ashkenazi congregation. It disappeared before the Revolution. The government nationalized most of the small businesses that had been owned and run by the eight hundred Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews of the city.

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee sent a representative to work out of Havana for an initial period of about two years. This representative was responsible not only for helping organize the Jews of Havana, but also to assist in the rebuilding of other Jewish communities. The input from the Joint Distribution Committee and other Jewish visitors was profound. Albojaire, a former president of the local Jewish community, states, "They taught us how to sing the prayers; they brought books, gefilte fish—and, most importantly, they taught what we couldn't to our children."<sup>32</sup> Albojaire explains what happened to the Jews of Camaguey. "Years without formally practicing and without any organized services really removed us from Judaism. Most of us, like me, had to marry out of the religion. There were no Jews."<sup>33</sup>

Most of the Jews at Camaguey were intermarried, and many of those expressing interest in Judaism were themselves only part Jewish. There was no interest in accepting a Reform definition of Jewish identity as patrilineal as well as matrilineal. Therefore in 1995, Rabbi Sztainhendler came to Camaguey to officiate at the conversion ceremonies of twenty-one people, mostly spouses and children of born Jews. This relatively large-scale conversion was not restricted to Camaguey; throughout the country there were many other conversions performed under similar circumstances.

Shortly after the revival began in the 1990s, Jewish communal leaders in Havana reached an understanding that conversions would be done to formalize their Jewish status for those who were either of Jewish origin or married to Jews. Individuals who approached the community without either Jewish ancestry or a Jewish partner but who were simply interested in Judaism were generally not allowed to convert, a reflection of the dominant national/ethnic conception of Jewishness. Conservative rabbis from South and Central America performed most of the conversions. Orthodox rabbis performed conversions through the Orthodox Ashkenazi Synagogue in Havana.

The Camaguey Jewish community now has approximately twenty-seven Jewish families. In 1998, on *Rosh Hashanah*, they rededicated a new synagogue building in a white-washed turn-of-the-century house, connected to a row of homes in the center of the city. The funding for the synagogue came from Ruben Beraja, an Argentinean Jew affiliated with the International Congress of Latin American Jews. He provided the \$6,000 purchase price. Alberto Roffe, a car mechanic whose grandfather emigrated from Turkey after World War I, leads the community.

Johandy Crespo, the community's youth group leader, told an American reporter, "The new *Tiferet Israel* is a reconnection with the past. This is our future."<sup>34</sup>

Merle Salkin, the Director of the Society Hill Synagogue in Philadelphia, has made several trips to Camaguey in order to teach Hebrew to the Jewish community. Salkin's congregation donated an additional \$3,000 for the Camaguey synagogue as well as for *Siddurim* and other ritual items. He explains, "This community reinvented itself in a few years. It was never organized. Families never knew what other families were doing."<sup>35</sup> Salkin reports that after the religious revival began, "people started coming out of the woodwork, asking questions and signing up for conversion classes."<sup>36</sup>

### **American and Canadian Jewish Aid to Cuba**

In the last several years there have been a significant number of foreign Jewish visitors, many of whom brought essential items for the Jewish community, but the earliest foreign organization to help the Jews of Cuba was the Canadian Jewish Congress. By far the most important Jewish communal organization assisting the Cuban Jewish community has been the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). The JDC has long been involved in helping underprivileged and/or persecuted Jewish communities around the world. It began operating in Cuba in 1992 and is universally praised for sending representatives to run services, teach classes and organize activities. These representatives have also trained a new generation of Cuban-Jews to perform these skilled functions on their own.

Other American organizations have also become involved. In February 1997, B'nai B'rith announced the formation of a Committee on Cuban Affairs, to be chaired by Elizabeth (Betty) Baer, wife of B'nai B'rith's International President Tommy P. Baer. The Committee was formed in the aftermath of a B'nai B'rith humanitarian mission in which thirty-two members of B'nai B'rith brought medicine, food, and clothes into Cuba. Six of the 32 participants were Cuban-born, including Michael Mandel, a cantorial student who performed concerts of Jewish songs for the Cuban community.<sup>37</sup>

The Miami Jewish Federation is funding the renovation of the *Patronato*, with much of the impetus coming from Cuban Jews living in South Florida. Now there is a constant stream of American visitors to the *Patronato* and other synagogues throughout the country. Many local Jewish Federations run missions to Cuba and some have adopted specific communities or projects. Individuals from various Jewish communities have also taken a special interest in the Cuban Jewish community. Frieda Dow of Houston made her third trip to Cuba in the spring of 1998 to bring supplies and encouragement to the Havana Jewish community. "They need the support of the Jewish people throughout the world, to know that we are there for them. They need to know that we want to bring them back into the mainstream."<sup>38</sup> American visitors benefit a great deal from this symbiotic relationship with the Cuban Jews.

Traditionally, the focus of foreign support by American Jews was geared toward the State of Israel, but in recent years Israel has become increasingly affluent.

Although there remain deep pockets of poverty in the country, many American Jews no longer feel that Israel needs them the way it did in the early years. Further, Israel's security appears to be less threatened than it did in any point in its history.

There is, therefore, a void that needs to be filled. For many American Jews the changes in the security situation of Israel come at a time when they are interested in turning inward and developing their own sense of spirituality. They are not looking to replace or supplement their earlier projects. And there are those for whom the project has to have a high level of urgency. In many ways Cuba is an appropriate setting for American Jews to express their solidarity with Jews around the world. There is no physical threat to their survival, but instead American Jews are helping the Cubans to rebuild their spiritual lives, individually as well as communally.

### **The Call to End the Blockade**

The renewed attention to Cuba's Jews has prompted some of the more politically liberal members of the American Jewish community to press for the end of the United States' blockade on Communist Cuba. The Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism submitted a resolution "On Opposition to the United States Embargo on Cuba" at the Orlando biennial conference of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC).<sup>39</sup> The resolution was not debated or voted upon due to a lack of time and is scheduled to be dealt with by the UAHC Executive Board in Summer 2000. This resolution was notable in that it was uncompromising in its disapproval of a prolonged embargo of 40 years because it "no longer serves a meaningful purpose and has had an increasingly devastating effect on the people of Cuba."<sup>40</sup> It noted that in April 1997, the Commission had urged President Clinton "to lift the ban on direct flights to Cuba in order to facilitate the provision of humanitarian supplies," and that it brought the matter before Congress in April 1998, urging it to pass the Cuban Humanitarian Trade Act, which would provide for an exception to the embargo for the provision of humanitarian relief by allowing citizens and permanent residents of the United States to fly to Cuba for humanitarian research and journalistic or religious purposes.

The resolution quoted Pope John Paul II, who said during his January 1998 visit to Cuba:

In our day, no nation can live in isolation. The Cuban people therefore cannot be denied the contacts with other peoples necessary for economic, social, and cultural development, especially when the imposed isolation strikes the population indiscriminately, making it ever more difficult for the weakest to enjoy the bare essentials of decent living, things such as food, health, and education. All can and should take practical steps to bring about changes in this regard.<sup>41</sup>

The UAHC resolution therefore called for the following three steps to be taken:

- (1) Call upon the President and Congress to revoke the embargo on Cuba except for military and police equipment; (2) Call upon the Prime Minister

of Canada and the Canadian Parliament to encourage the United States and other nations that currently have Cuban embargoes in place to lift those embargoes; and (3) Urge the governments of the United States and Canada to work strenuously to persuade the Cuban government to end its repressive policies.<sup>42</sup>

### **The Future**

Although there have been repeated prophecies of Fidel Castro's fall he has managed to retain power longer than predicted. Yet almost everyone speaks of *when* the government will change, rather than *if*. Tourism continues to grow and bring in substantial amounts of hard currency; at the same time it increases the gap between those who have access to dollars and those who don't. The stagnant peso economy means that those who work for salaries earn less; as a result many professionals become desperate to leave the country or find alternative sources of income. Stories abound of doctors moonlighting as bellhops and of nuclear engineers driving taxis.

Castro has wisely allowed Cubans to receive remittances sent from family members who have successfully emigrated. Remittances from abroad are the third largest source of hard currency for the country.<sup>43</sup> The largest has become tourism and the second largest is the sugar industry. Nodarse estimated that between 1989 and 1997, Cubans living abroad sent at least three billion dollars to relatives and friends in Cuba. Others believe it may have reached as much as \$800 million a year. If this is true, then remittances would be the largest source of hard currency, exceeding profits from both tourism and sugar cane production. Much, if not most, of that money is spent in government-owned stores.

But the attempt to stifle capitalist economic competition has produced many problems. Employees steal whatever they can from their employers. Because of low salaries and the lack of other opportunities most employees see this as a legitimate fringe benefit of the job. Thus, a Cuban who works in a restaurant will bring food home every night, while one who works in a gas station may bring home diesel fuel.<sup>44</sup>

Corruption is endemic and is quietly tolerated by the government; the alternative could cause a violent and potentially fatal blow to the regime. Yet it is apparent to all that the quality of state-supplied services is declining drastically. The government has allowed limited development of a primitive free market system which it has found difficult to regulate.

The expectation that Cuba's government would undergo a rapid change has made the slow changes that have occurred seem anticlimactic. Pope John Paul II's visit generated tremendous publicity and a steady stream of stories magnifying the country's social problems. Much attention is given to the phenomenon of the *balseros*, the rafters who attempt to sail from Cuba to the United States in small boats, homemade rafts (*balsas*), or even inner-tubes,<sup>45</sup> with Elián González the most celebrated notable. There has also been much attention to the growing phenomenon of prostitution, which is particularly ironic consid-

ering that the Revolution was partly a moral reaction to the corruption of the Batista regime.<sup>46</sup> And as cigar smoking has come back into fashion, Cuba has become the subject of considerable interest for its famous cigars, notably Cohiba, which Fidel himself smoked before giving up the addiction.

There is no question that more changes are in store for Cuba; the country is in the midst of a dramatic transformation. It now seems unlikely that this change will take the form of a revolution; rather, an underground capitalist economy is developing alongside the government-sponsored economy. It may be a matter of time before the power of the dollar will eventually uproot and destroy the Cuban economy. This is already happening, and it may continue even without any further external involvement.

Many outside of the country, most notably the Cuban exiles, eagerly await further change. The more recent Cuban immigrants in the United States are essentially economic refugees who simply want the country to prosper for the sake of their relatives left behind and for love of their homeland. Many of the early exiles, however, are dedicated anti-Castro activists with deep personal hatred for Castro and a strong desire to see his government destroyed.<sup>47</sup>

Thousands of other Americans—tourists, business people, and investors—await “not a battle cry, but rather the lifting of the United States embargo on trade with Cuba.” Though many Americans believe that “ending the embargo would be a big mistake,”<sup>48</sup> a recent Time/CNN poll conducted in January 2000 has shown that a majority support the establishment of diplomatic relations with Cuba and an ending of the economic boycott.<sup>49</sup>

### **Can the Resurgence of Jewish Life Continue?**

The Jewish community in Cuba is undergoing a strong resurgence and at the same time a drain on its numbers through continual emigration. Life in Cuba today remains a struggle. The few stores that exist are poorly stocked. Almost everything is rationed. Very few people have cars; most of the vehicles on the road are old and in constant need of repair. Yet the Cubans are cheerful, concentrating on the good and trying to have as much fun as they can.

Because of the difficulty of life in Cuba, it is inevitable that some Jews will continue to want to emigrate. There is a steady stream, however, of “newly rediscovered Jews” who have Jewish roots, or who are married or connected to Jews, or want to be Jews. One would expect that over the next couple of years the resurgence of newly discovered Jews would slow and come to an end.

But this may not happen. We know that in the lands of the former Soviet Union there were said to be nearly two million Jews. At least eight hundred thousand immigrated to Israel and many others went to the United States, Germany, or other countries. Today, the estimated number of Jews in the former Soviet Union is still calculated to be about two million. This may be simply due to miscalculation, but it may also indicate a process of continuous replenishment as people rediscover their roots and are integrated as newly intermarried couples into the community.



Most Cuban Jews are concentrated in the largest cities, especially Havana. There are very strict laws in Cuba concerning where one can and cannot live. It is forbidden to just pack up and move to Havana. What happens is that young people from the provinces come to Havana to study. They then have government permission to stay and study during their university years. If they are offered a job in Havana at the conclusion of their studies, or if they find a spouse or partner, or are able to give another acceptable reason for staying, then the government may allow them to stay. Alternately, they may use their university years in Havana to prepare for emigration. But some will stay and economic and political developments may attract new members to the Jewish community in the years ahead.

### NOTES

1. The study of the Jews of Cuba is a relatively recent scholarly concern. Robert Levine, of the University of Miami, and Margalit Bejarano of the Hebrew University, have done much of the research. Levine published a full-length work entitled *Tropical Diaspora: The Jewish Experience in Cuba*, published by The University Press of Florida, 1993. Levine has also collaborated with Mark D. Szuchman of Florida International University, who was born in Havana to Polish Jewish parents, to produce a considerable amount of research on Cuban Jews now living in South Florida. For more information see Robert M. Levine, "The Story of 'Hotel Cuba' and Original Video Tape," Website: [www.jewishcuba.com](http://www.jewishcuba.com).

2. Margalit Bejarano wrote her doctoral dissertation at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem on the history of the Jewish community in Cuba from 1898 until 1939. Some of her published articles include "The Jewish Community of Cuba 1898–1939: Communal Consolidation and Trends of Integration under the Impact of Changes in World Jewry and Cuban Society" [in Hebrew], *Institute for Contemporary Jewry Annual* Vol. 5 (1992): 305–327; "Antisemitism in Cuba under Democratic, Military, and Revolutionary Regimes, 1944–63," *Patterns of Prejudice* Vol. 24, No. 1 (Summer 1990): 32–46. She has also written extensively on antisemitism in Cuba in the 1940s and 1950s, including a monograph written in 1996 in Spanish on the Jews of Cuba entitled *La Comunidad Hebrea de Cuba*.

3. Havana historian Maritza Corrales Capestany is now working on a series of monographs on the history of the Jews of Cuba up until 1973, the year that Cuba broke diplomatic relations with the State of Israel. Corrales has done extensive research on the history of individual Jews who have lived in Cuba during the course of the twentieth century. She is in the process of tracing the personal history of each and every person who was ever buried in a Jewish cemetery anywhere in Cuba. She has also produced an extensive analysis of state-held death records to find out what was the listed cause of death and to try to draw out social history conclusions from that information. Similarly, she is also in the process of making comprehensive lists of each Jewish-owned business in the various cities of the country up until 1960.

Corrales is also working on the history of Jewish refugees who arrived in Cuba during World War II, as well as the incident of the *St. Louis*, the ocean liner carrying 1,128 Jewish refugees from Germany that anchored off the coast of Cuba in 1939. Corrales has also inspired the most recent article to appear on Judaism in Cuba, which was "El Judaismo: Características en Cuba" by Daisy Farinas Gutiérrez, published in *Panorama de la Religión en Cuba* (Havana: Editora Política/La Habana), 1998, p. 57. Gutiérrez's article was written for a collection on religion in Cuba published in time for Pope John Paul II's visit to Cuba in 1998.

4. Geoff Simons, *Cuba: From Conquistador to Castro* (London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 221.

5. Interview with Joseph Levy, *Centro Sefaradi*, Havana, November 1999.

6. Moishe Asis "El Judaismo Cubano," Website, [www.jewishcuba.com](http://www.jewishcuba.com).

7. Ann Crittenden, "Jews in Cuba," *The New York Times*, December 12, 1977.

8. Mimi Whitefield, "Jews in Cuba: The Fragile Flame," *The Miami Herald*, December 9, 1990, p. H-4.

9. Margalit Bejarano, "Antisemitism in Cuba under Democratic, Military and Revolutionary Regimes 1944–63," *Patterns of Prejudice* Vol. 24, No. 1 (1990): 32–46, see p. 32.
10. Robert Lacey, *Little Man: Meyer Lansky and the Gangster Life* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1991), p. 324.
11. Robert M. Levine, *Tropical Diaspora: The Jewish Experience in Cuba* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993,) pp. 251–252.
12. Interview with Maritza Corrales Capestany, February 2000, Havana, Cuba.
13. Magalit Bejarano in an interview with *The London Sunday Telegraph*.
14. For a summary of the development of Israeli-Cuban foreign relations, see Allan Metz, "Cuban-Israeli Relations: From the Cuban Revolution to the New World Order," *Cuban Studies* Vol. 23 (1993): 113–134.
15. Interview with Adela Dworin, Vice President of the *Patronato*, Havana, November 1999.
16. Although the Cuban Communist party reversed its position on religion in the early 1990s, there had been a gradual tempering of attitudes that occurred over a relatively long period. On the evolution of the relationship between church and state up until 1984, see John M. Kirk, "From Counterrevolution to *Modus Vivendi*: The Church in Cuba, 1959–84," in *Cuba: Twenty-Five Years of Revolution 1959–1984*, edited by Sandor Halebsky and John M. Kirk (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1985), pp. 93–113.
17. These statistics were culled from the *Amario Pontifica Vaticano*.
18. On the amazing endurance of religion in Communist Cuba, see Teresita Pedraza, "Thus Too Shall Pass: The Resistance and Endurance of Religion in Cuba," *Cuban Studies* Vol. 28 (1999): 16–39.
19. On the "Special Period," see *Cuba–Período Especial: Perspectivas*, La Habaña, De Ciencias Sociales, 1998.
20. Tom Masland, "Learning to Keep the Faith," *Newsweek*, Vol. 125, No. 11, March 13, 1995, p. 30.
21. Kenneth Bandler, "Communities Reclaim Property as Local Jewish Needs Multiply," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, April 1996.
22. Bandler, "Communities Reclaim Property."
23. Author's interview with Adela Dworin, Havana, November 1999.
24. Author's interview with Salim Tache, Administrator of *Adath Israel*, Havana, November 1999.
25. The Cuban government is actively seeking investors to help salvage buildings in dire need of repair. But because of Cuba's communist orientation most potential investors have been extremely reluctant. There is certainly a fear that if the Communist regime should fall unrestricted development would destroy historic landmarks. A popular T-shirt is sold in Little Havana in Miami that shows a drawing of the Malecón, the area of Havana along the sea front, with wall-to-wall fast-food restaurants. A Florida organization, the Cuban National Heritage, is devoted to developing zoning codes that would restrict South Florida developers from wantonly destroying sites of historical importance.
26. Laura Gooch, "Cuba's Jews Struggle to Renovate their Crumbling Synagogues," February 16, 1999, published in the *Cleveland Jewish News*. I would like to thank Ms. Gooch for giving me a copy of her paper.
27. Interview with Maritza Corrales Capestany, Havana, February 2000.
28. Lesley Pearl, "Bay Area Jews Visit Cuban Shul for First Bar Mitzvah in Twenty Years," *Jewish Bulletin of Northern California*, June 13, 1997.
29. Pearl, "Bay Area Jews Visit Cuban Shul."
30. Eitan Behar, communication to the author, December 27, 1999.
31. Behar, communication to the author.
32. Behar, communication to the author.
33. Behar, communication to the author.
34. Behar, communication to the author.

35. Behar, communication to the author.

36. Behar, communication to the author.

37. Richard D. Heideman, the International Chairperson of B'nai B'rith's Center for Public Policy, stated, "In keeping with B'nai B'rith's 153-year tradition of providing aid to Jews throughout the world, we have created this special committee to assist in improving the lives of this isolated community who are in desperate need of even the basic necessities of life. . . . We plan to obtain and send educational and religious materials written in Spanish and sponsor more humanitarian missions. The needs are immense" (B'nai B'rith press release, February 12, 1997, Website: [www.bnaibrith.org](http://www.bnaibrith.org)).

38. Cecile S. Holmes, "Impoverished Cuban Jewish Community Fights for Survival," *Houston Chronicle*, Website: [www.cubanet.org](http://www.cubanet.org), June 1998.

39. Countering the Commission's resolution, *The Forward*, an American Jewish newspaper, presented a conservative political position on the issue of eliminating the economic boycott of Cuba. Its editorial, "Wrong Exodus," published in the October 22, 1999 issue, argued that eliminating the economic boycott would not strengthen human rights in Cuba. According to the writer, Jewish human rights activists have consistently rejected the argument that American investment will weaken a totalitarian regime. Such a position was opposed when suggested as a strategy to liberalize oppressive governments in the Soviet Union and South Africa, and it is almost universally rejected in trying to deal with Iran and Iraq today. The editorial concluded, "It's hard to understand why all of a sudden there's a desire to abandon this pattern and carve out an exception for Cuba. If the Reform movement passes the resolution, it will be encouraging more cash for Fidel Castro's coffers and a weakening of American efforts to contain other rogue regimes. Cuba and America would be better off if the ones fleeing weren't the Jews, but the communist dictator and his goons."

40. "Proposed Resolution on Opposition to the United States Embargo on Cuba," *Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism*, September 1999.

41. Proposed Resolution on Opposition to the United States Embargo on Cuba."

42. Proposed Resolution on Opposition to the United States Embargo on Cuba."

43. Hiram Marquetti Nodarse of the state-funded Center for Studies of the Cuban Economy in a recent study in the Cuban business magazine, *Negocios*.

44. Frank Smyth, "Letter from Havana," *Salon Newsreel*, Website: [www.salon.com](http://www.salon.com), January 4, 1999.

45. Holly Ackerman, "The Balsero Phenomenon, 1991 to 1994," *Cuban Studies* (1997): 169–199.

46. For a history of Cuba as a "sin paradise" of gambling, drugs, and sex see Rosalie Schwartz, *Pleasure Island: Tourism and Temptation in Cuba* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

47. The most comprehensive study of the Cuban American community in South Florida is María Cristina García, *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida, 1959–1994* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). Also see David Rieff, *The Exile: Cuba in the Heart of Miami* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993). For a description of Cuban American Popular Culture, see Gustavo Pérez Firmat, *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban American Way* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1994).

48. Gary Turbak, "VFW Castro's Communist Cuba," *VFW Magazine*, Website: [www.vfw.org/](http://www.vfw.org/) magazine, June 20, 1998.

49. CNN News Report, January 2000.