Double Diasporas

How might the Cuban Jewish story shape our attitudes to new immigrants today?

Like most immigrant communities, when Jews moved from Cuba to the United States they sought integration, seeking acceptance into both the Jewish and broader American communities. However, they found themselves needing to follow the racist laws of Florida and not being fully accepted by the Jewish community already present in Miami. Their story is one of creating a community within societal boundaries that were both hostile to Black Americans and unwelcoming to Jews who were not from the established Ashkenazi or Sephardic communities.

GOALS

- Participants will understand the societal boundaries that existed when Cuban Jews arrived in Florida.
- Participants will explore how different identities, cultures, and views divide the Jewish community.
- Participants will think about what it would mean to welcome new immigrants into an established community.

MATERIALS

- Appendix A: “A Cold Day” with bracketed portions
- “Double Diasporas: Researchers Bio” video Mark Goldberg https://vimeo.com/784642127/c059b827bb
- “Double Diasporas: Main Video” from 9:59 to 12:10 https://vimeo.com/784641459/0a2ecb41e0
- Paper/pens/pencils

LESSON

Introduction: 5 minutes
We are going to let the scholar Mark Goldberg introduce himself and the work that he has done on Cuban Jews migrating to the Miami area. As you watch the introductory video, pay attention to what he shared about himself and his identity and the questions he asked himself for the project. Latin/x/e* and Jewish peoples in America have complicated histories with the racial system in the U.S. Today we are going to explore one of those stories and some of that history.

Watch “Double Diasporas: Researchers Bio” video Mark Goldberg

Warm-up: 5 minutes
Tell your ancestors' United States origin story with one other family or a partner. If you are aware of any hardships your family faced or what made them decide to live where they did once they came to the U.S., please share.

Discussion: 12 minutes
This video provides background about Jews moving from Cuba to Miami Florida. Watch “Double Diasporas: Main Video” from 9:59 to 12:10

- What would you say are the main takeaways?

Small Group Work: 15 minutes
We will discuss more after you spend some time reading selected portions of “A Cold Day” and discussing the primary source along with the video. Answer the following questions in your small group:

- What do you see as the problems from the point of view of the people who just arrived in Miami?
- What do you see as the problems from the point of view of the people who had been in Miami before the 1960’s?
- Is there a middle ground?

- In what ways did choices made by the Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jewish communities and by the Cuban Jewish community perpetuate racial discrimination and White supremacy?

Would any group like to share what you talked about?: 5 minutes
It's clear from what we learned today that many Cuban Jews did not feel welcomed and could not find a home in the existing community.

Activity: 20 minutes
In the same small groups, you will either write a welcome Public Service Announcement (PSA) to a newly immigrating group of people or a PSA to the existing community to remind them to deeply welcome the new arrivals. Your PSA might be on social media, might be printed in a newspaper, be a commercial on visual or audio streaming platforms, etc... Part of the project is choosing how to get your message out. Once you pick the platform, determine the main points of your message, create text and/or graphics, and be prepared to share.

Welcome PSA: Create a message that conveys deep welcoming to the newcomers.

Be Welcoming PSA: Create a reminder for the existing community to be welcoming of the newcomers.

Share out: 10 minutes

Close: 2 minutes

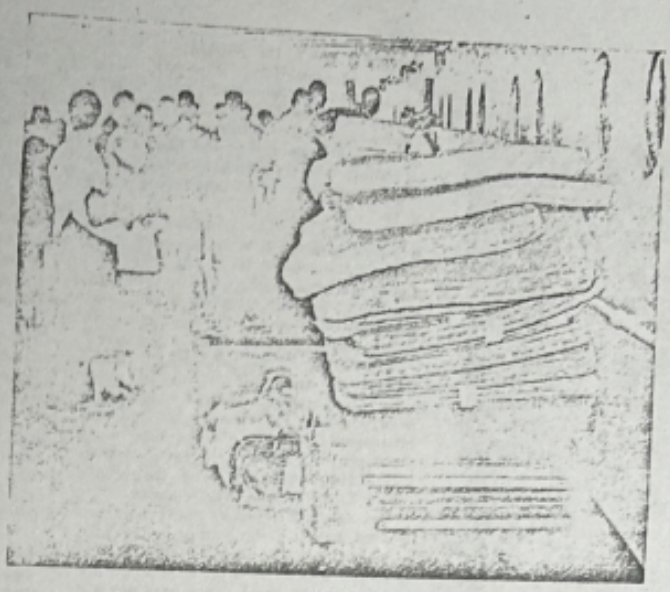
We discovered that race in the U.S. impacted Cuban Jews' experience from the moment they arrived in the U.S. and had to choose where to live. This topic has a lot of layers because our identities are layered and experiences are impacted by race in the U.S. We also discovered that Cuban Jews felt othered in the new community and many never did gain a sense of belonging within the previously existing Jewish community. With intention, we can help to ensure that Jews will find our communities welcoming. Thank you for sharing your ideas with the group.

RESOURCES

"Miami's Lesser Known Community of Cuban Jews" i24 News
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r8-nRkA6G44&t=7s

Latine originated within the Latine genderqueer community, because it's easier to conjugate in Spanish and due to criticisms of the anglicization of "Latinx." Like identity, language is constantly evolving, and we look forward to seeing how this conversation continues.

A COLD DAY IN MIAMI



Cuban refugees arrive in Florida. In the photograph, the bedding used by evacuees for the overnight trip from Havana.

WHEN the Jews in Cuba looked at Fidel Castro they decided that, despite the beard, this was no prophet for them. His words fell like hail on tombstones. The Jews listened and remembered other torrents, other graveyards. So they fled.

Many landed on the nearby shores of Miami, Florida, where together with their companions in exile, the Christian Cubans, they imagined life would be similar to what they'd known. The Cuban Jews couldn't know that these old friends would shrivel away, turned cold and ugly in sunny Miami, a neon fringed city where even warmth is a commodity.

And they couldn't know that the Jewish residents of the tourist-hungry cities of Miami and Miami Beach would forget their traditional role and respond with — indifference.

Of the four to five thousand Jewish families living in Cuba, eighty per cent left. Some boarded the chartered planes provided by Israel. A few families went to Puerto Rico and Venezuela. But the majority of the Jewish colony headed for the city only a few score miles distant — Miami. Most then migrated on to other United States cities, but today there are approximately four hundred Cuban Jewish families living in the Great Miami area.

by EDYTHE SCHINDLER

feature writer for the Jewish Floridian *published in Miami. She won First Prize in the 1964 Florida Short Story Contest. Her short stories and articles have appeared in leading publications.*

They were prepared for the feelings of displacement, for the language barrier, for the disappointing search for work, for the need of compromise and adjustment. The older people expected the trauma of exile and the hardship of starting all over again. The young knew the problems implicit in beginning in a strange land were before them. What came as a surprise was the lack of empathy between the Jewish community in Miami and the exiles fleeing tyranny.

In Cuba, the Jews comprised a compact, closely knit group characterized by strong Zionist feelings. Some were the direct descendants of the Jews who were expelled from Spain in 1492. Others had immigrated from Eastern Europe — Russia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, in the 1920s. In 1932 and until the outbreak of World War II, small groups of Jews came from Germany and Austria. After the war, many Jews came to Cuba from the concentration camps of Europe. Perhaps it was because they thought of themselves as part of a world-wide community that they expected a warm welcome in Miami.

"The Miami Jews think of us only as Cubans," said Saul Ginzburg, "they don't consider us Jews."

Tall, with black patent leather hair and an old world air of courtliness about him, Mr. Ginzburg is now a traveling salesman. He sells shoes to chain outfits throughout the South. In Havana he owned a textile factory.

Reflecting on the implications of his experience in Miami, he said, "My father was the first of our family to come to Miami. He lived here for three and a half years and he suffered here. He suffered from indifference."

When Saul Ginzburg's father died a few months ago, in Miami, two hundred people came to his funeral.

"But not one," said Mr. Ginzburg, "was a Miami Jew."

There are many cases that illustrate shades of reactions in the Miami-Jewish community. For instance, while Mr. Jaime Schuchinsky is more fortunate than most, he still wonders why Miami failed him.

When Mr. Schuchinsky arrived in Miami about three years ago, he spoke no English. In Cuba he'd been a successful and somewhat affluent businessman. In Miami he couldn't find a job. Finally, in desperation, he went to New York where he found work as a salesman for a vinyl plastic fabric firm. Now, six months later, his employer has pressed a three-year contract upon him. Now he speaks English.

"In Miami," said Mr. Schuchinsky, "they don't seem to understand why the Jews had to leave Cuba. After all, we had a good life there. We Jews were all like one big family. What they don't understand is that everything was taken away from us at the point of a gun."

Groping for reasons for indifference, Mr. Schuchinsky speculated that perhaps its basis was fear. Historically, dif-

(Continued on page 59)

Appendix A

Edythe Schindler, "A Cold Day," American Judaism (Fall 1964): 58-59

A COLD DAY IN MIAMI

(Continued from page 20)

ference and discrimination have usually been linked. The Cuban refugees, with a different culture and language, are resented by many Miamians. For the Miami Jews to identify with their Cuban co-religionists might jeopardize their cozy sun-dappled niche.

"Then too," he said, "Cuban Jews stood in Miami with one foot on its handy shore and one foot poised for the leap back to Cuba. One encouraging word out of Washington and we were ready to go back. The impermanent status we consoled ourselves with could hardly encourage involvement."

Nevertheless Mr. Schuchinsky left Miami because he could find no one to speak with – no one, that is, who was interested in his situation. His memories of Cuba are bittersweet but he recalls the time when thousands of German refugees arrived in Cuba. He remembers what the Jewish colony there did about the refugees.

"We sought them out. It would have been a gross default of hospitality not to have welcomed them, not to have assisted them in finding a home or a job or a school for learning the language. There was not one Jewish family that didn't have a refugee staying with them for some time. This is the reception we expected in Miami."

Much rancor has stemmed from the housing situation. On Miami Beach many of the apartment houses are owned by elderly Jewish couples. Initially, they were glad to rent to Cuban Jewish families. But when these families opened their homes to displaced relatives and friends, the friction began.

There were too many noisy children, too many cars usurping the limited parking spaces in front of the buildings. Apartments designed for families of three or four were soon accommodating as many as six and eight people. The Jewish landlords forgot that they or their parents were once refugees. Soon the Jewish landlords were shouting, "Why don't you go back where you came from?"

Reeling under the barbs of their Jewish hosts, the Cuban Jews turned to face still another unexpected reaction. Miami has spawned another area of anti-Semitism. Whereas in Cuba the Christian community never harbored any ill feelings toward their Jewish countrymen, here in Miami they succumbed to the disease. Zealous to immerse themselves in Americana, the Christian Cubans are taking to anti-Semitism as the Cuban peasants are to Communism. In Cuba the appellation for a Jew was "Polaco." It is in Miami that the word has acquired a derisive connotation.

Perhaps it is Rabbi Abramowitz of Temple Menorah of Miami Beach who best understands the Cuban Jews. Formerly a director of the Joint Distribution Committee in Italy, he is well versed on refugee problems. He visited Cuba in 1960 and met many Jewish families there. Now he has opened his house and temple to them. But, he asks, who in Miami has concerned himself with the basic problems of the refugees: where am I going to live, what are my legal rights, where can I find a job? And what confuses the Cuban Jew, like Saul Ginzburg, who has been welcomed in the temple, is that he and his wife have yet to make a close personal friend there. Not one Miami Jew has invited them to his home.

This is what is so unexpected. This is what the Cuban Jews miss. In Havana their social life evolved out of their relationships in their temple, the magnificent Patronato in the Vadado section. Some, of course, belonged to the El Centro Israelita in Old Havana. But even there, all the people attended the social functions and festivities.

The Secretary of the Patronato was Dr. Bernardo Benes, aged twenty-nine, round of face and red haired. Son of parents who immigrated to Cuba in 1926, Bernardo Benes fought in the streets of Havana against Batista's forces. As a young law student he was concerned with politics. In 1959 he became convinced that Castro had betrayed the revolution, that he was a Communist. Impelled by the realization that totalitarianism, whether of the right or left, is an unhealthy climate for a Jew, he fled the country with his famliy.

Dr. Benes found employment with the Washington Federal Savings and Loan Association of Miami Beach. Starting as a clerk, he has now graduated to the position of a vice-president. With his wife and three children, he is slowly carving out a life in the new land. But, as Dr. Benes points out, for the older people it is not as easy.

His father owned a wholesale leather factory in Cuba. In Miami he wasn't able to find work. Recently Dr. Benes was able to bring over his wife's parents who now have to live with them in their small Miami Beach apartment.

What Dr. Benes decries is the lack of community effort in Miami. So many of the employers in Miami are Jewish. So few volunteered their efforts in finding work for the refugees. Through his position and the cooperation of Washington Federal, Dr. Benes has been able to place a few refugees with his institution.

"We are just too unimportant for the Miami Jews to bother with," Dr. Benes said. "What we cannot adjust to is the lack of warmth. People here seem afraid of close relationships. All they're interested in is money."

Now the transplanted colony has organized itself. The Cuban Hebrew Social Circle of Miami has a program of cementing contacts within the group. The feeling was that the young people, the teen-agers especially, need to feel they belong.

"We want to celebrate Jewish Holidays together like we did in Cuba," said Dr. Benes.

When the Social Circle tried to find a meeting place they turned to a Miami Beach Y.M.H.A.; they were turned away. To the refugee group who had lost everything in Cuba, the Miami Beach Y complained of money problems. If they made their facilities available to the group in the evenings, who would meet the light bill?

"We are a naive people," said Dr. Benes. "We expected to be greeted with love, not with its opposite—indifference."

Sometimes it is not what men do and feel that is wrong. Often it is what they leave undone, what they cannot feel. ■

Appendix A

Edythe Schindler, "A Cold Day," American Judaism (Fall 1964): 58-59