**University of Miami, Spring 2008**

Professor Ruth Behar  
email: rbehar@umich.edu  
Room: MM 125K  
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 25th.

**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:


**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


**Recommended:**


**February 4:** Jewish Cubans and the Cuban Revolution


Recommended:

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


“Lo hebreo en el pensamiento de José Martí” (1954)


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


February 11: A Tribe to be Saved: “Castro’s Jews”


**Recommended:**


**February 18: Searching for Sephardic Traces**


**Recommended:**

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


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


**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:**


**PROSPECTUS FOR FINAL PROJECT DUE ON FEBRUARY 25.**

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


**Recommended:**


FIRST PAPER DUE ON MARCH 7.

**March 10: Spring break**

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


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


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

**Recommended:**


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


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

Recommended:


SECOND PAPER DUE ON APRIL 4.

April 7: Research and Writing Sessions


Recommended:


April 14: Research and Writing Sessions


Recommended:


April 21: Last class, Presentation of final projects.

Films on Cuban Jews
(Read about the reaction to the film--http://www.jewishcuba.org/hotel.htm)

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)
Temple Menorah (www.templemenorahmiami.org)
The Shul of Bal Harbour (www.theshul.org)

**Web Sites**
http://www.utexas.edu/cola/orgs/lajsa/resources/ (Latin American Jewish Studies Association)
www.thecajm.org (Cuban-American Jewish Mission)
www.jewishcuba.org
www.jewishmiami.org
www.granma.cu/ingles/index.html (Cuba's daily newspaper in English)
www.granma.cubaweb.cu (Cuba's daily newspaper in Spanish)
www.jrebelde.cubaweb.cu (Juventud Rebelde, youth-oriented Cuban newspaper)
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 (U.S. government view on Cuba issues, including travel)

www.globalexchange.org (specializes in educational and volunteer visits to Cuba)

www.afrocubaweb.com

www.cubanismo.com (Cuban art)

www.cubaencuentro.comunidad (Spain-based online magazine on Cuban culture, politics, and literature)