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Caroline Bettinger-Lopez. *Cuban-Jewish Journeys: Search for Identity, Home, and History in Miami.* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000. xli + 277 pp. $15.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-57233-098-6.

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Home Is Where the History Is

One of the pleasures of migrating to Miami is the opportunity to hear an extraordinary variety of migration stories and to compare them with one another and your own. During a "roots" project discussion in my eleventh-grade U.S. history class, one student proudly announced: "I am a Juban [pronounced You-bin]." Living on Miami Beach for a few years, I knew more than a few people who were Jewish in religion and Cuban in origin, but this was the first time I had heard this particular appellation used.

In the 1990s, at least 15,000 of Miami Beach's 90,000 residents were Cuban Jews–those who had migrated to Miami in the early 1960s and their descendants. It is a group largely unrecognized in the rest of sprawling Miami-Dade County, where even Cubans and Jews find the combination unlikely or even impossible.

Though born and brought up in Miami, Caroline Bettinger-Lopez, the author of *Cuban-Jewish Journeys*, did not know Cuban Jews existed before beginning her investigation. She has turned her undergraduate thesis on the group into a book with a foreword by her mentor, Ruth Behar. Bettinger-Lopez's question is: "What temporal, spatial, and physical factors allow today's Cuban-Jewish community to remain so unique?"(p. xix). Her answer is divided into two parts: a telling of the migration story, and an ethnographic investigation of the community created by the migrants. A strength of the book is the sampling of available primary source material, including interviews, photos, and illustrations gathered under one cover and illuminating both subtopics. Another characteristic of the book is the author's personal immersion in the subject as she describes not only the Cuban-Jewish community but her own responses, as a Jew born in Miami, to her discovery of this group of people and the story which shaped their community. At one point, a family she has interviewed attempts to pair Bettinger-Lopez up with a young male member of the family, giving the author an intimate but unnerving glimpse of Cuban-Jewish matchmaking customs.

In the first section of the book, Bettinger-Lopez makes an important addition to the conventional wisdom about the Cuban-Jewish migration. While a common hypothesis explains the concentrated Cuban-Jewish presence on Miami Beach as the result of Miami Beach's reputation as America's most Jewish city in the 1950s and 1960s and its resulting empathy for Jewish migrants, the Cuban-Jewish informants in Bettinger-Lopez's book universally describe indifference and even hostility as the initial attitude of Miami Beach's Jewish residents toward the Cuban-Jewish migrants.

In the second section of the book, Bettinger-Lopez provides a rich description of the Cuban-Jewish community at the turn of this century, almost forty years after the mass migration from Cuba. Topics include gender relations, relations among Sephardic and Ashkenazic groups, the *turcos* and *polacos* within the Cuban-Jewish community, religious and cultural institutions, and the relationship between the migrants of the 1960s and later arrivals.

At the heart of her text, in chapter 4, Bettinger-Lopez conducts an extended discussion of the concepts of "diaspora" and "homeland," leading to an explication of *Juba* and *jubanidad*, her perception of a unique constructed place and a constructed individual and group identity made both possible and fluid by "geographic place and historical space"(p. 153). She supports her theoretical discussion with several in-depth interviews in this and subsequent chapters, demonstrating that Cuban Jews in the practical living out of their lives are able to maintain a creative tension between Diasporic Judaism and Israel, Miami and Cuba. Living in *Juba* and sharing *jubanidad* make it possible for them to see no unbridgeable distinctions between Havana and Miami, the United Sates and Israel.

While some readers with expectations of conven-

tional historical objectivity may not appreciate the author's injection of personal history into the investigation, the extent of the primary source material in the book keeps the focus on the Cuban-Jewish community rather than on the author.

When my student in the early 1990s claimed, "I am a Juban," he was staking out a position in the world that Bettinger-Lopez has described with empathy and depth.

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