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## THE JEWS OF MIAMI

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*Fidel Castro's Greatest Achievement / The Fourth Largest Jewish Concentration in the World / Stability, Diversity, Low Inter-marriage / Jewish Education, Observance, and Synagogue Affiliation / "Miami Beach" Today / "Snowbirds" and Summering in New England / Day Schools But Little Beyond / Religious Changes: From "Star" Rabbis to "Do It Yourself" Shteiblach*

### Fidel Castro's Greatest Achievement

A visitor's first impression of the Miami area is that Fidel Castro's greatest achievement was the transformation of South Florida into the economic and social capital of Latin America. In truth, for those who knew the area three decades ago and more, the present metropolitan region is a very different place than it was before the Castro revolution in Cuba. Tourism in the area is still important in the local economy, but is lost among the conventional pursuits of the permanent residents who go about their daily lives as Americans do in every other part of the country.

To this observer, used to the pseudo-Spanish character of California and the Southwest which while pseudo rested on a base of original Hispanic settlement, the pseudo-Spanish character of Coral Gables looks out of place, but not less attractive for all that. It is just that South Florida is in the process of

manufacturing an identity for itself, something that has long since been accomplished in other parts of the United States, perhaps with no greater authenticity than today in the Miami area.

While I was in Miami, an Indian prayer circle was discovered near the mouth of the Miami River. Anywhere else in the world it would have been dismissed as totally insignificant, but in a Miami hungering for "heritage," it became a cause célèbre until finally the county and state authorities had to intervene to purchase the property from the developer who uncovered it while in the process of erecting a multi-story condominium. It was set aside as a park and, almost immediately, schools were bussing in schoolchildren every day to see the "heritage" of Miami's original inhabitants. I was swept with a feeling of déjà vu of Colorado of the 1940s where, as a child in Denver, a furniture store in our neighborhood had

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"Antiques Made While You Wait." But the event was also a sign of the new sense of permanence permeating South Florida. Now people are there not just to vacation or to spend their last years awaiting death, but are there to raise children and to give them an identification with their surroundings.

Nor are retired senior citizens as visibly prominent on the landscape as they once were. Again, there are pockets, one should even say whole tracts of retirees, particularly in Broward County between Miami and Palm Beach where gated communities (communities surrounded by walls whose limited access is controlled by gates and guards for the security of the residents) abut one another for miles, each one filled with its particular group of retirees, many of them Jews.

The real news about the Miami area is the fact that Dade County, which includes Miami, Miami Beach, Hialeah, Coral Gables, and many other cities, contains a clear Spanish-speaking majority and adjacent Broward County to the north is acquiring a very substantial Hispanic minority. Latin America now begins some fifty miles north of the Gulf of Mexico on the U.S. mainland.

In addition to the Hispanic permanent residents, there are thousands of Latin Americans who own condominiums in the Miami area which they use periodically when visiting Florida for shopping, business, or vacation. These, of course, are the wealthier classes, and many of the permanent residents have become wealthy as well, so that this is not the kind of immigrant group that the U.S. knew in earlier times that had to go through two generations before they had visible legal wealth, but had to do so mainly by being cut off from their countries of origin. This is an immigrant group with close connections with the "old country," thanks to the improvements in transportation and communications. It is also an immigrant group which has added a spice to the life of South Florida lacking in earlier times.

#### The Fourth Largest Jewish Concentration in the World

The three counties that comprise southeast Florida (Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach) have a permanent Jewish population reckoned at 650,000, the third largest Jewish concentration in the United States and the fourth most heavily concentrated metropolitan population of Jews in the world, be-

hind the Tel Aviv, New York, and Los Angeles areas and just ahead of the Jerusalem area. In *Florida Jewish Demography*, vol. 7 (May 1994), demographer Ira M. Sheskin, who has conducted demographic studies of the area for well over a decade, estimated that southeast Florida had 693,000 Jews, including part-year residents who totaled about 3 percent in Dade County, 11 percent in Broward County, and 23 percent in Palm Beach County. Thus, the 650,000 estimate refers only to permanent residents.

#### JEWISH POPULATION IN SOUTHEAST FLORIDA

Dade County	202,000
South Broward (Hollywood)	75,575
North Broward (Ft. Lauderdale)	206,424
South Palm Beach (Boca Raton/ Delray Beach)	116,000
Palm Beach (Boynton to Jupiter)	93,000
Total	693,000

*Florida Jewish Demography*, vol. 7 (May 1994), p. 4.

Demographically, this region is now a powerhouse in the Jewish world, but its transformation has not only been in this dramatic increase in numbers. The community has also acquired a permanence, an intergenerational character, and a diversity that represents the binary opposite of the "Miami" or "Miami Beach" of postwar Jewish mythology.

Within the three-county region, Greater Miami has been losing population to Broward County to the north. Between 1982 and 1995 the Jewish population in Dade County declined by 25 percent, with most of this decline occurring in the 1980s. Between 1990 and 1995, there was only a 3 percent decline, all from Miami Beach.

According to Dr. Sheskin's comprehensive 1995 study of the Dade County Jewish community, the median age of part-year Jewish residents is 70, but the median age for full-year residents is 47, still higher than the national Jewish average but not by as much, reflecting a considerable decline over the previous decade. The percentage of the Jewish population age 60 and over is 37 percent, compared to 19 percent for Jews nationwide (National Jewish Population Study, 1990), but much less than the 70 percent of Jews in Palm Beach County or the 55 percent in South Broward.

Moreover, in Dade County, 22 percent of the households contain children.

### Stability, Diversity, Low Intermarriage

Far from being a transient community, Dade has one of the highest percentages of residents for 20 years or more of any American Jewish community — 55 percent, compared to 29 percent for all American Jews. In South Dade, that percentage goes up to 67 percent.

In 1995, 6,800 people from Dade County (4.2 percent) identified themselves as Israelis, 10,000 (6.3 percent) as Sephardic, 9,000 (5.6 percent) as Hispanic, and 1,200 (1.6 percent) as from the former Soviet Union. The intermarriage rate in South Florida was among the lowest in the country, 12 percent in Miami and 9 percent in the counties to the north, compared to 45 percent reported by the National Jewish Population Study. In Miami, even of those married under the age of 35, only 18 percent are intermarried.

### Jewish Education, Observance, and Synagogue Affiliation

Younger Jewish adults consistently had more Jewish education than older ones, with three-quarters of those under 35 having some Jewish education as children, and more than one-fourth having attended day school. While only 37 percent claimed to be synagogue members at the time of the study, about 76 percent indicated that they were or will be members at some time during their lives. 93 percent of all households claim to currently belong to a Jewish group and/or donate to a Jewish charity and/or always practice one or more Jewish rituals. 46 percent of Jewish households are located in high-rise apartment buildings.

The distribution of Jews among the branches of Judaism has remained constant in the 1980s and 1990s: 34 percent Conservative, 32 percent just Jewish, 26 percent Reform, and 9 percent Orthodox. 76 percent of Jewish households have a *mezuzah* on their front door. 67 percent claim to always attend a Seder; 65 percent always light Hanukkah candles; 23 percent always light Sabbath candles; 12 percent are kosher in and out of their homes; 8 percent are kosher only in their homes; and 7 percent refrain from the use of electricity on the Sabbath. 55 percent of households had at least one of their members visit Israel, the highest percentage recorded in any American Jewish community (all

data from *Florida Jewish Demography*, vol. 8, September 1995).

### “Miami Beach” Today

Miami Beach still has its senior citizens, most visible around the Beach hospitals which are probably the best in the area. The hotel buildings of the glitz and glamour days are still there and some of them have the same names, although ownership of virtually all of them has changed and some have been turned to other uses. They are no longer the tourist draws that they once were. Today one is more likely to go to the Fountainbleu Hotel for a Federation or other Jewish organizational dinner than to show off one's affluence to one's peers.

Miami Beach has lost its Jewish majority but not its Jewish presence, which today is embodied in the very strong Orthodox community concentrated around 41st Street, which is lined with kosher restaurants and other Jewish commercial and institutional establishments from one end to the other. One cannot fail to be impressed with the liveliness of the new Jewish presence and its youth, consisting as it does of young and young middle-aged couples with children wearing *kippot* and with their *tzitzit* hanging out, and with the mother's head covered or *b'sheitled*. On the other hand, South Beach, once the habitat of Jewish seniors, is now the restored “in” neighborhood for evening entertainment in the area. Amidst its re-conditioned art deco buildings is the last shul in the area and the local Ziff Museum of Miami Jewish History.

Another very strong Jewish area includes the Aventura retirement complex far north of the Beach. Jewish residents in the area of the two zip codes that embrace that part of the region claim that there is a higher concentration of Jews in these two zip code areas than anywhere else in the diaspora. Whether that is the case or not, Aventura is the second area where the Jewish presence is highly visible. Kosher restaurants are a common sight on the street and in the great shopping malls. North of Aventura in Broward County there is still another large concentration of Jews, but it is less visible because of the area's suburban character. So it goes in pockets on up to the West Palm Beach-Palm Beach area and even to the north as far as Jupiter.

### **"Snowbirds" and Summering in New England**

In South Dade County one has the phenomenon of Key Biscayne, once notoriously restricted, and now with a large concentration of the most affluent Jews, both permanent residents and "snowbirds" (those who come down for the winter and then return home), living in their \$1 million plus apartments. Many of the most active community leaders live on Key Biscayne or adjacent islands, as do many retired national Jewish leaders.

A new phenomenon in South Florida is a reverse of the snowbird pattern. When the area's weather gets very humid and the hurricane season is in high gear, a substantial number of South Florida Jews go north to summer residences in the Berkshires or other cooler spots in the Northeast where they have summer homes.

### **Day Schools But Little Beyond**

In short, on the popular level, Jewish life is alive and well in southeast Florida, at least by contemporary American standards. To give the reader some idea of the density of the web of Jewish life at that level, the latest issue of *Jewish Living*, the directory of Jewish services issued by the Greater Miami Jewish Federation, lists more than 30 kosher restaurants, 129 synagogues, and 31 day schools of all types including 7 high schools. The community has settled in but it still has a way to go. This year the Greater Miami Jewish Federation hopes to raise \$20 million from its 160,000 Jews, a relatively low figure in comparison to other Jewish Federations of similar size such as Chicago, Baltimore, San Francisco, and Boston. It is estimated that Miamians who still spent part of their year elsewhere contribute a similar amount to their local Federations.

On the other hand, Jewish educational and cultural services above the popular level have not yet emerged. A Jewish concentration of over 600,000 souls should support institutions of higher Jewish education and Jewish studies programs at general universities far beyond what is available in the Miami area. University Jewish studies programs exist at every major university in the area but are just beginning to emerge in strength. Jewish institutions of higher education other than two *yeshivot* may exist as visions in the minds of a few of the leadership, but have gone no further.

The University of Miami has the largest Jewish studies program in the region including both tradi-

tional Jewish studies and Middle Eastern studies in two separate units. It has just launched a campaign to raise \$18 million to establish a center for contemporary Jewish studies at the university. Word has it that half of the sum was in hand before the campaign was publicly announced. Florida International University, the state university in Dade County, has a Jewish studies program plus Jewish studies in its excellent Department of Religion, whose chairman, Nathan Katz (an Associate of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs), is an expert on the Jews of South Asia. Florida Atlantic University, serving the northern part of the region, also has a Jewish studies program. All of these programs serve not only their enrolled students but also adult constituencies drawn from among the Jews in the area.

These constituencies reflect the interest in Jewish culture in the area. Not only do the many retired people in the Miami area have the leisure time as well as the inclination to make use of the opportunities that do exist, but there are many adult education efforts and study groups with serious subjects, especially classic texts, that have attracted serious participants. Parallel to such mainstream Jewish study as exists, there is also the usual Jewish attraction to "New Age"-type experiences of spirituality, *kabbalah*, and a mixture of Judaism and Eastern religions. This may be a sign that the area is in the middle of its development, beyond the first step but not yet a fully mature Jewish community.

### **Religious Changes: From "Star" Rabbis to "Do It Yourself" *Shteiblach***

The community has changed religiously as well. In its earlier days it was dominated by "star" rabbis in large congregations whose preaching attracted crowds, many or most of whom were tourists or "snowbirds" who returned every winter. Those rabbis are all gone now, either passed away or retired, and the area synagogues have settled down into more ordinary routines, serving permanent congregations and providing much more than spectacular sermons.

If there is a strong visible presence it is that of Habad, the Lubavitch movement which has become the dominant force in a resurgent Orthodoxy. The visitor is initially surprised to find Habad so influential as a regular daily force beyond simply being an outreach mechanism. My guess is that where the

other movements came down to the area in earlier times only to raise money for their national institutions, seeing "Miami" as a place where so many wealthy Jews wintered and could be "milked" more efficiently, Habad picked up on the fact that the permanent resident Jewish population was becoming more important and got in on the ground floor in providing them with services. Many of the Orthodox congregations in the area are openly connected with Habad. Their constitutions will even specify that they are governed by Jewish law as specified in the *Shulhan Aruch* and in the *Tanya*, the manual prepared by the first Lubavitcher Rebbe which serves as a sacred text for Habad.

Otherwise, religiously, Miami seems to be like other American Jewish communities which divide between Orthodox and non-Orthodox. Orthodoxy has become a powerful local force, not because of its numbers but because a far greater number of those in the Orthodox community are younger and more serious than ever before, whereas in the past most of those self-identified as Orthodox simply attended Orthodox synagogues, when they attended, in the manner of earlier generations. The Conservative movement, caught straddling that divide, has lost considerable visibility locally, although it remains the majority movement in South Florida, settling into the conventional system of suburban synagogues. The Reform movement is undergoing that special form of Jewish renewal that we see elsewhere, far more ready and willing to speak in traditional Jewish language, to apply the traditional Jewish conceptual framework to all those who fall within their orbit, whether Jewish by traditional standards or not.

One of the consequences of the great Latin American migration to the Miami area, especially the great Cuban presence locally, is that Miami has become a center of Sephardic life in America. The area has six Sephardic congregations, some primarily for Cubans but increasingly serving other Spanish-speaking Jews from other parts of Latin America as well, and also the significant Israeli population found locally. Israelis with Sephardic family backgrounds have come to the area to pursue their personal goals and many have stayed. They have either joined or organized Sephardic congregations in the manner of Sephardic Jewry generally, where Orthodoxy is not the propelling force but a traditionalism that maintains Jewish

custom and practice without leaving formally Orthodox frameworks, even if their own personal behavior may be far from Orthodox. The Sephardim are enthusiastically maintaining their religious traditions in their synagogues, but have no separate schooling for their children, so the question remains as to what will happen in the next generation. For this visitor, going to one of the Sephardic synagogues on Purim was like going to a service of Israelis of Moroccan background in Israel.

The Sephardim have also tried to go beyond that and develop a cultural program rooted in the Sephardic heritage as their contribution to the entire community. It is embodied in the annual "Sephardic festival," now of six weeks duration, which may be the largest community-wide Jewish cultural program in the community.

South Florida Jewry, like the area itself, still has more glitz and glitter than more staid communities in the Northeast and Midwest. In that respect it bears a certain resemblance to Southern California. In fact, many Hollywood personalities have established a part-time presence in the Miami area, making their lifestyle even more visible. To the outsider, Miami's culture still seems basically low-brow to middle-brow, although efforts are being made to develop serious high-brow culture as well. It still has the relaxed and often intimate character of a southern town, reinforced by the fact that the area has no center but is indeed a congeries of small and medium-sized cities and suburbs. More than anything else, however, this observer had the feeling that, both generally and Jewishly, Miami is a powerhouse waiting to find the ways and means to take off and make its presence felt in the world, and that that next century would see it as one of the handful of "world cities" that were there to be reckoned with.

All told, then, the Miami region holds many surprises within American Jewish life, including the uniqueness of an Hispanic American Jewry located within the U.S. If only because of its size and its continuing growth, it is a community to watch, in ways that are far more compelling than before.

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## **Practical Privatization: Lessons from Cities and Markets**

This volume, one of the first of its kind, outlines how outsourcing and privatization can be used by Israel's local authorities to improve their ability to deliver quality services to their residents at lower cost.

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- In Naples, Italy, a private wastewater company treats the sewage, burns the remaining sludge to generate power, and uses the leftover ash to make bricks and tiles.

Contracting with outside private and specialized entities that gain economies of scale by operating on business lines in many localities, offers small local authorities perhaps the best means for independent survival. Outsourcing may also be done through allowing the present employees of a local authority to organize privately to take over the delivery of the services they have been providing governmentally in the past.

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