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Caribbean Jewry: A Model of Tolerance or Assimilation?

As an Orthodox Jew growing up in New York City, it was hard to imagine that Jewish life existed anywhere else let alone in a remote region of the world such as the Caribbean. That statement may seem odd today in a world of global technology where we are “all connected,” but during the 1970s it wasn’t that far-fetched. The Holocaust, which wiped out a third of the world’s Jewry, had ended thirty years earlier, Israel was a developing country—hardly the center of Jewish life, and people in Midwestern and certain Pacific Coastal regions of the US had never actually encountered a Jew. Yet in NYC, Yiddish could be heard among many of the non-English languages spoken throughout the city, kosher delis were springing up everywhere, and a very Jewish Ed Koch was elected mayor.

Jewish life outside of the newly developed Jewish State seemed reserved for the million or so Jews living in the corner of the Earth comprising NYC. It’s a wonder, then, that New York was not actually the first established Jewish community in the Western hemisphere. That title actually belongs to a coastal town, known as Paramaribo, in the small South American country Suriname followed by the Caribbean Island of *Curaçao*. What is yet even stranger is that several Caribbean Islands had thriving Jewish communities yet reported no incidents of antisemitism. As a prejudice theorist specializing in antisemitism, it is odd explaining a lack of prejudice, specifically for a people who have been the targets of prejudice wherever they have lived for over two thousand years.

This paper, therefore, has several goals. First, it outlines the history of the Jewish migration to various Caribbean Islands, with a focus on the Haiti, the Netherland Antilles, Cuba, and Suriname. Second, it provides actual accounts of Jewish life in the Caribbean. Third, it highlights the history of antisemitism or lack thereof and the Caribbean Jewish disappearance, and presents theories of tolerance to account for both with future directions of research.

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The History of the Jews of the Caribbean

The history of Caribbean Jewry is as old as the New World itself. It should come as no surprise that *conversos* from Spain and Portugal set sail for the New World to escape persecution. However, what may not be apparent at first is the unfolding of Caribbean Jewish history and its relationship to antisemitism. Jews sailed to the New World as *conversos* to escape antisemitism and were determined to hold on to their Jewish identities often at great costs. Paradoxically, when the peril ended and Jews were given the opportunity to practice the Jewish religion freely, they chose to relinquish their faith through intermarriage and assimilation, or they emigrated and left the Caribbean altogether. The next segment traces the history of antisemitism in the Caribbean from the Spanish-Portuguese Inquisition through the present day.

The Inquisition was one of the darkest times faced by Diaspora Jews; antisemitism was at its height, second only to the Holocaust. The Edict of Expulsion forced the Jews to wander and settle in faraway lands, often still unsure of their safety to practice Judaism freely. Then their history took an interesting turn. By the nineteenth century, Jews gained religious freedom and acceptance in all realms of society. Antisemitism seemed to magically disappear but so did the Jews. Many chose to emigrate, mostly to the US or various South American countries, while others chose to assimilate, intermarry, and in essence shed their Jewish identities.

The Inquisition

Contrary to popular belief, the Spanish Inquisition actually began in 1391 when Ferrant Martinez, a friar in Seville, instigated a pogrom against the Jews. The pogrom came to be known as the Massacre of 1391. Eighty-six years later in 1477, another Dominican friar from Seville, Alonso de Hojeda, implored Queen Isabella to deal with Andalusian *conversos* who were secretly practicing Judaism (crypto-Jews). Queen Isabella and Ferdinand II of Aragon pressured Pope Sixtus IV to agree to an Inquisition to rid Spain of crypto-Jews. On November 1, 1478, Pope Sixtus IV agreed publishing *Exigit sinceras devotionis affectus*, the papal bull giving Ferdinand and Isabella the authority to appoint their inquisitors and root out all heretics.

In 1483, Queen Isabella appointed Tomas de Torquemada (inquisitor-general) and two Dominican monks, Miguel de Morillo and Juan de San Martin, to head the Inquisition and set up the tribunals in Spain. The *conversos* in Seville

were the first targeted. Between 1486 and 1492, twenty-five *auto-da-fés* were held in Toledo, in which hundreds of people were either burned at the stake or imprisoned. By the time the Inquisition reached Barcelona in 1492, over 13,000 *conversos* were put on trial, and ultimately that same year the Jews of Spain were expelled. Many fled over the border into Portugal.

In 1531, Pope Leo X extended the Inquisition to Portugal. As with Spain, tribunals were set up in cities throughout the country. The Inquisition continued until the late eighteenth century and spread to Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the New World. Those Jews and *conversos* fleeing from Portugal and Spain to the New World were not safe in colonies such as Goa, Brazil, and Mexico, until the late eighteenth century.¹

Expulsion

The intent of the Spanish Inquisition was to prevent *conversos*/New Christians from practicing Judaism. In order to prevent *conversos* from interacting with Jews (who seduced faithful Christians to stray), the monarchy formally expelled all Jews from Spain. The Edict of Expulsion, also known as Alhambra Decree was issued in January 1492 (and not revoked until 1968).² Jews were given approximately four months to either convert to Christianity or leave the country, after which the sentence was death without trial. Any non-Jew caught sheltering or hiding Jews had their belongings and hereditary privileges confiscated.³

While historic accounts of those Jews expelled from Spain differ, it is estimated that between 100,000 and 200,000 Jews either emigrated that year or converted.⁴ The Jews of Castile emigrated mainly to Portugal only to be expelled in 1497, and some went to North Africa; the Jews of Aragon went to Italy. The Sephardic Spanish Jews travelled to Europe, North Africa, and the New World until settling and establishing communities in cities such as Amsterdam and Antwerp. Those *conversos* who remained in Spanish and Portuguese territories

1 Cf. H. A. F. Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

2 Cf. R. Eder, "1492 Ban on Jews Is Voided by Spain," *New York Times*, December 17, 1968, <https://nyti.ms/1RThnvN>.

3 Cf. J. H. Elliott, *Imperial Spain 1469–1716* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964).

4 Cf. Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*; M. L. Margolis and A. Marx, *A History of the Jewish People* (New York: Scribner, 1964); J. Telushkin, *Jewish Literacy: The Most Important Things to Know About the Jewish Religion, Its People and Its History* (New York: William and Morrow, 1991).

were the continuously suspected of secretly practicing Judaism and continued to face persecution until the eighteenth century.

Those Jews who sailed to the New World were followed by the friar-inquisitors and were thus in peril in the New World as well. Many New World *conversos* found creative means of survival, acting as brokers, traders, financiers, pilots, cartographers, and makers and users of astronomical tables and nautical instruments used for trade and often piracy against Spain.

There are reports of Jews who actually engaged in piracy to free the American and Island colonies of the Spanish. Jewish pirates include Moses Cohen Henriques, a Dutch privateer who captured a Spanish silver fleet off Havana in 1628; Sinan “the Great Jewish Pirate” allied with the Barbary pirates in the mid-sixteenth century; and Rabbi Samuel Pallache, who in his youth attacked Spanish ships and later founded the Jewish community in Amsterdam.⁵ Caribbean Jews were determined to free themselves of the antisemitic yoke that still took hold in the New World through whatever means necessary.

Fear of persecution of the original Jewish communities is apparent in the Spanish-Portuguese synagogues still standing in Suriname and Curaçao today, both of which maintain the sandy floors put down during the Inquisition to muffle the sounds of prayers and allow for Jews to gather in secrecy.

Settling in the New World 1500 – 1800

Haiti

Luis de Torres was the first Jew to settle in Haiti in 1492. Like many Jews, he immigrated to escape persecution. He left Spain with Christopher Columbus as his *converso* interpreter. Most Jews, however, immigrated to Haiti after it was conquered by the French in 1633. Their stay was short lived—in 1683, France expelled the Jews from Haiti, leaving only a few high positioned officials of French trading companies. Haitian Jews experienced little peace in Haiti during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, culminating with the 1804 slave revolt of Toussaint L’Ouverture, which resulted once again in the death or expulsion of the Jews. Nevertheless, Jews continued to settle in Haiti as an escape from persecution and civil strife in Europe.

⁵ Cf. E. Kritzler, *Jewish Pirates of the Caribbean: How a Generation of Swashbuckling Jews Carved Out an Empire in the New World in Their Quest for Treasure, Religious Freedom—and Revenge* (New York: Anchor Books, 2008).

As a French Colony, public schools in Haiti were reserved for Catholics causing Jews to once again hide their religious identities in order to attend schools. Most Jews settled in port cities, making their livings as tradespeople. Archaeological evidence supports the existence of ancient Jewish communities in Jérémie, Cap Haitien, and Jacmel.

The Netherlands Antilles (Curaçao, St. Maarten, and Bonaire)

Archaeological evidence indicates that Jews arrived to the island of St. Maarten during the Spanish Inquisition, and a Jewish community existed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Recently the ruins of an abandoned synagogue (c. 1781) were discovered along with the remains of a historic Jewish cemetery.

The Jews of Curaçao differed from those of St. Maarten and other Caribbean communities. Curaçao, sometimes referred to as the “Mother of Jewish communities in the New World,” was home to the wealthiest Caribbean Jewish community.⁶ Samuel Cohen was the first Jew to arrive in Curaçao when the Dutch conquered the island from the Spanish in 1634. In 1651, twelve Jewish families arrived from Amsterdam and established Congregation *Mikvé Israel*. The Jewish community settled on Plantation *De Hoop* (*The Hope*). In 1659, a second group of Jewish settlers arrived with the first Torah scroll (still used today in the *Mikvé Israel-Emanuel* Synagogue). By 1660, the Jews concentrated in Willemstad, and in 1674 they constructed the first of four synagogues in Willemstad. This synagogue was replaced in 1703 with a much larger one, the *Snoa* synagogue, which was then replaced by the magnificent Temple Emanuel. The now unified *Mikvé Israel-Emanuel* Synagogue congregation uses the *Snoa*.⁷ Most of the Jews in Curaçao were of Sephardic descent, and by 1732, Congregation *Mikvé Israel* became the center of Jewish religious life.

The Jewish population in Curaçao became very influential. By the end of the eighteenth century, the Jews constituted more than half of the white population in Curaçao. They fought alongside Simon Bolivar in Venezuela and Colombia’s fight for independence against Spain. They were prominent businessmen excelling in international trade, shipping and maritime insurance, and transportation.

⁶ Cf. M. Arbell, *The Jewish Nation of the Caribbean: The Spanish-Portuguese Jewish Settlements in the Caribbean and the Guianas* (Jerusalem: Gefen, 2002), 23.

⁷ I. S. Emmanuel and S. Emmanuel, *History of the Jews of the Netherlands Antilles* (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1970).

Many of these Jewish firms and commercial shops continue still exist on the island today.

Cuba

According to some reports the first Jews (*marranos*) arrived in Cuba with Christopher Columbus: Luis de Torres (Santa Maria), Juan de Cabrera (La Pinta), and Rodrigo de Triana (La Nina).⁸ Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Jews immigrated to Cuba from Brazil. However, under Spanish rule they were harassed, and many assimilated into Cuban society.⁹

Suriname: The Oldest Jewish Community in the Western Hemisphere

Suriname (also referred to as Republic of Suriname) is a country in northern South America, bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the north. Although it is not an island, it is a member of *CARICOM* (the Caribbean Community) and is considered a Caribbean country. Suriname has a population of approximately 560,000, many of which reside in the northern capital of Paramaribo. Many of the first Jews to settle Suriname were of Spanish and Portuguese descent that fled to Holland and the Dutch colonies to escape persecution. Many immigrated to Brazil for a small fee and became merchants or sugarcane growers, but when the Portuguese recaptured Brazil from Holland, many of the Jews fled Brazil to settle in other Dutch colonies.¹⁰

The first Dutch Jews arrived in Suriname as early as 1639, with a second group of Jewish settlers arriving from England in 1652 with the help of Lord Willoughby of Parham. The third group of Jewish settlers arrived with Joseph Nuñez de Fonseca (David Nassi) from Dutch Brazil. After the Portuguese defeat in 1654, they settled in Suriname in 1666. Most established sugarcane plantations in Torarica, the capital of Suriname, and later in Cassipora and Jodensavanne along the Suriname River. The Portuguese Jewish Congregation of Suriname was founded in 1662. The first synagogue *Kahal Kadosh (Holy Congregation): Beracha Ve Shalom (Blessing and Peace)* was built in 1667 and the Jewish Court of

⁸ Cf. Margolis and Marx, *A History of the Jewish People*.

⁹ Cf. J. R. Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World: A Sourcebook 315–1791* (New York: Hebrew Union College Press, 1999).

¹⁰ Cf. C. Potok, *Wanderings* (New York: Knopf, 1978).

Civil Justice (*The Mahamad*) was established in 1785 and gave the court assembly (*Senhores do Mahamad*) the right to act in all matters of civil justice.¹¹

By 1667 the Jews of Suriname were granted full religious and economic freedoms by the Dutch government. The Jews of Suriname prospered. By 1730 they owned 115 of 400 plantations in Suriname. Then in 1767, Jewish business practices were questioned by the local government and general population causing an economic downturn. By 1791 Jewish plantation ownership declined to only 46 of 600 plantations. Additionally, internal strife caused a rift between the Sephardic and Ashkenazi communities leading to a division of congregations. The *Neve Shalom (Oasis of Peace)* synagogue built in 1719 in Paramaribo became the Ashkenazi synagogue in 1735, and the Portuguese Sephardic community built their own synagogue in Paramaribo called *Sedek Ve Shalom (Justice and Peace)*.¹²

Acculturation: 1800 – 1950

Haiti

The largest Jewish migration to Haiti occurred between the late 1800s and early 1900s from predominantly Arab lands in the Middle East, when antisemitic incidents were on the rise. Prior to this era, there was little antisemitism in Arab lands. Jews, living in the Muslim world, were given dhimmi status or a second-class citizenship, which was restrictive in nature but for the most part afforded a peaceful life. As “People of the Book,” they received relative security against persecution. The Damascus affair in 1840 led to a rise in antisemitic incidents throughout the Middle East.¹³ A French law giving French citizenship to minorities in French-controlled North Africa and the Middle East allowed many Jews from Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt to move to Haiti. Thirty Jewish families arrived during this period bringing with them their Sephardic customs and traditions.

¹¹ Cf. C. C. Goslinga, *A Short History of the Netherlands Antilles and Surinam* (New York: Springer, 1979).

¹² Cf. *ibid.*

¹³ The Damascus affair began on February 5, 1840, when Franciscan Capuchin friar Father Thomas and his Greek servant were reported missing. The local authorities believed that Jews had killed them to use their blood in the making of Passover Matzos. Solomon Negrin, a Jew, was arrested, tortured, and forced to confess along with several other Jews. The incident was followed by violent attacks on Jewish communities throughout the Middle East. Cf. B. Lewis, *From Babel to Dragomans: Interpreting the Middle East* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004).

When the United States occupied Haiti between 1915 and 1934, many Jews took the opportunity to move to the United States. Before the start of World War II, the Haitian government issued passports and visas to Eastern European Jews escaping Nazi-occupied Europe.¹⁴

Curaçao

In 1864, the Reform Jewish Movement built Temple *Emanuel*. Today the merged congregations comprise *Mikvé Israel-Emanuel*, referred to as the oldest synagogue in the Western hemisphere housing the Jewish Historical Cultural Museum. The synagogue contains 18 Torah scrolls over 300 years old—dating back to the Spanish Inquisition in the late 1400s. The synagogue’s remarkable architecture, solid mahogany interior, eighteenth-century copper chandeliers, and sand-covered floor have remain a monuments and the number one tourist attraction in Curaçao.¹⁵ United Congregation *Mikvé Israel-Emanuel* continues to be the oldest active Jewish congregation in the Americas. World War II produced a Jewish war hero. George Maduro fought during the war in the Netherlands and later joined the resistance. In 1945 he was captured by the Germans and later died in Dachau.

Cuba

Jewish immigration to Cuba increased in the late 1800s, after Jose Marti liberated Cuba from Spain in 1898. In 1904 following the Spanish–American War, a group of American Jewish war veterans immigrated to Cuba and founded a congregation in Havana. American Ashkenazi Jews immigrated to Cuba to work for US-owned plantations and businesses, and in 1906 the United Hebrew Congregation was founded.

The period from 1910 until 1920 saw a large influx of Jews from Turkey and Eastern Europe looking to settle in the United States but was denied due to the “quota system” immigration policy. Due to the lack of antisemitism in Cuba, some of the new Jewish immigrants stayed and fared well, mostly in Cuba’s growing garment industry. Two synagogues were erected in Camaguey, *Shevet*

14 Cf. R. Batti, “One More Step toward ‘Never Again’,” *The Almanac* 47, March 14, 2012, <https://haitiholocaustsurvivors.wordpress.com/published-articles/one-more-step-toward-never-again/>.

15 Cf. Emmanuel and Emmanuel, *History of the Jews of the Netherlands Antilles*.

Ajim and *Tiferet Israel*. A Jewish community was founded in Santiago in 1924, called the Jewish Society of Eastern Cuba. The society was housed in a rented space until 1939, when it finally moved into a new building, which became the Synagogue of Santiago de Cuba. By 1924, there were 24,000 Jews (commonly referred to as “Polacos”¹⁶) living in Cuba, and in the 1930s, the Central Jewish Committee was formed. Seventy-five percent of Cuba’s Jewish population lived in Havana. Havana hosted five synagogues, a kosher restaurant, one Jewish high school, and five Jewish elementary schools. Limited Jewish immigration continued throughout World War II (with the S.S. Saint Louis being denied access).¹⁷

Suriname

In the 1800s the economy began to decline, and the Jewish population began to dwindle. Pirate raids, sugar devaluation, depletion of agricultural soil, and the end of the slave trade all took their toll on the economy. Plantation communities disappeared along the coastline, and the remainder of the Jewish community relocated in Paramaribo.

Tales of Antisemitism: From 1950 to the Present Day

By the 1950s most Jews living in the Caribbean left the islands, most immigrating to the United States for economic opportunities and higher education. Many recounted their stories of life on the islands with fondness and gratitude for the hospitality provided by their host countries.

Haiti: Eli Abady, Gilbert Bigio, and Bill Mohr of Haiti

By the late 1950s, most of the Haitian Jewry left for economic opportunities and Jewish marriage partners. Today, only a handful of Jews remain mostly in Port-au-Prince.

¹⁶ The Cubans referred to all immigrant Jews and non-Jews without an English accent as “polaks.”

¹⁷ Cf. G. Thomas and M. Morgan-Witts, *Voyage of the Damned* (New York: Stein & Day, 1974).

The Abadys arrived in Haiti from Aleppo, Syria via Cairo, Egypt, circa 1900 and established a textile business in Port-au-Prince. Though there was no official Jewish sector, these Sephardic Jews tended to settle in the neighborhoods surrounding the capital city of Port-au-Prince. Unlike the Jewish communities of Curaçao and Suriname, the Jews of Haiti had no synagogue, no rabbi, no schools, and no community center of their own. On Jewish holidays, prayer services and meals were celebrated in home gatherings. Since there was no rabbi or center of Jewish life on the island, even the Jewish ritual of circumcision had to wait until a mohel (a doctor or rabbi who performs a Jewish circumcision) was brought in from the United States. Sometimes the ritual, which is traditionally performed on boys at eight days old, waited for years.

Eli Abady explained that he did not receive a Bris until the age of two “because there was no mohel living on the island.” Nonetheless, he and his brother Clement and four sisters Fortune, Rene, Alice, and Esther led a happy childhood. They attended the neighborhood Catholic schools without experiencing any antisemitism whatsoever. When asked about it Eli replied, “There was no antisemitism in Haiti. Everyone was always very accepting and kind to us. They never made us feel different.” Although the Jewish community was scattered around the island, he always felt a sense of community. When asked how they were able to get together without living in the same area, the reply was matter-of-fact, “Haiti is very small. It didn’t take long to get to anyone’s home.”

By the 1950s, many Jews left Haiti for the United States. Eli like many of the young people of his generation immigrated to the US in the early 1960s in pursuit of economic and matrimonial prospects. In the years that followed, Eli arranged for visas for his family to immigrate to the United States.

Of the prominent Sephardic families residing in Haiti—the Bigios, Chrems, Silveras, Ashkenazies, Danas, and Shaloms, only Gilbert Bigio remains. Bigio has been the unofficial leader of the Sephardic community in Haiti and continues to hold yearly Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services in his house. Bigio owns the only Torah in all of Haiti, which is necessary for Sabbath and High Holiday services. Additionally, as one of the few Jews remaining in Haiti and a prominent businessman, he serves as the honorary consul for Israel in Haiti.¹⁸ When asked if he’s ever experienced antisemitism in Haiti, Bigio laughed. “On the contrary, the Haitians have a lot of respect for the Jews, and a lot of admiration for

18 Cf. P. Woodward, “Does Haiti Billionaire, Gilbert Bigio, Make Israel Look Good?” *Ezili Danto*, January 25, 2010, <http://www.ezilidanto.com/zili/2011/03/haitis-billionaire-industrialist-gilbert-bigio/>.

Israel,” he said, pointing out that Haiti voted for the United Nations partition of Palestine in 1947, which created Israel.¹⁹

Sephardic Jews however, comprised only a portion of Haitian Jewry. In 1937, the Haitian government issued passports to European Jews escaping the Holocaust. Bill and Harriet Mohr founders of *Haiti Holocaust Survivors (Almanac*, March 14, 2012) described Haiti as a comfort and “healing place to be,” where they were welcomed and cared for.²⁰ It was a safe haven for Jews, some of whom stayed through the 1950s and some of whom used it as a transit stop until they could gain entrance into the United States. For those who left and built homes in the United States, Haiti saved their lives and the Haiti Jewish Refugee Legacy Project was designed by the Mohrs to inform the world and honor those Haitians who saved Jewish lives during the Holocaust.

Curaçao

Although Jewish firms and commercial shops continue to be forerunners in the island’s economy, the number of Jews residing in Curaçao has diminished over the years. Today fewer than 350 Jews remain on the island, out of a total population of 125,000. On many of the islands, Jews usually leave to attend universities in the United States and marry within the Jewish faith.

Victor Abady, a prominent business owner in Curaçao arrived from Aleppo, Syria in the early 1900s and established textile and retail businesses. Though it is rare, he and his family keep a kosher home, built a ritual mikveh, and employed a rabbi to run a Jewish day school in the heart of this colorful island. The Curaçao Community Hebrew School (for children ages five through twelve) is run out of Congregation *Sharei Tsedek*. The local supermarket carried a full line of kosher groceries imported from Israel, the United States, and Europe. When asked about antisemitism on the island the answer was the same for each member of the Abady family, “what antisemitism?”

Though Victor’s son Aaron Abady eventually left Curaçao for the United States, he unequivocally said that antisemitism never factored into his decision. Like many Jews before him, leaving the Caribbean was based on religion and matrimonial prospects for his children. Nonetheless, Aaron’s home in Curaçao

¹⁹ L. Luxner, “Haiti’s Few Jews Hold on to History,” *Miami Herald*, March 21, 2004, <http://faculty.webster.edu/corbette/haiti/miscopic/ethnic/jewshistory2.htm>.

²⁰ “The Haiti Holocaust Project Seeks Information,” *Repeating Islands: News and Commentary on Caribbean Culture, Literature, and the Arts*, issued July 18, 2010, accessed July 7, 2020, <http://repeatingislands.com/2010/07/18/the-haiti-holocaust-project-seeks-information/>.

and his father's business remains. The Jewish community in Curaçao still maintains one of the most historic synagogues in the world. United Congregation *Mikvé Israel-Emanuel* in Curaçao, Netherlands Antilles, is the oldest active Jewish congregation in the Americas (founded in 1651), and continues to follow the Sephardic traditions. The Curaçao Community Hebrew School is now run in conjunction with Congregation *Sharei Tsedek*, a conservative Ashkenazi community, and Jewish cemeteries such as *Beth Haim* may still be visited on the island with tombstones dating back to the 1600s.

St. Maarten

The Jews currently living on St. Maarten are recent immigrants from other Dutch Islands, the United States, and Israel who came for vacation or business and remained. Less than ten years ago, the Jewish community of St. Maarten opened its first synagogue since the eighteenth century. The synagogue and new Chabad Center operated by Rabbi Moishe and Sara Chanowitz officially opened its doors on January 3, 2011. Once a church, the 1,200-square-foot space sits in the Simpson Bay Yacht Club over Zee Best, a French pastry shop on the Dutch side of the island. The synagogue serves 300 Jewish permanent island residents and over 1,000 visitors during the tourist season. Little is known about the Jews who first came to the island as refugees from the Spanish Inquisition except that there was a sixteenth- and seventeenth-century community that was abandoned late in the seventeenth century.

An interview with Rabbi Moishe of the Chabad house of St. Maarten revealed that antisemitism on St. Maarten was a non-issue. He added that the locals show the Jewish community on the island tremendous respect and admiration, and everyone gets along and coexists without fear. Le Grand Marche Supermarkets has made kosher food (which is imported from the US, Israel, and France) available on the island and Jewish children are home schooled and receive both a Jewish and secular education.

Cuba

By 1952, only 12,000 Jews remained in Cuba. After the Revolution, 94 percent of Cuba's Jewish population fled. Those who remained were assimilated into Cuban society. Members of the Caribbean Jewry maintain that antisemitism is not experienced in any Caribbean island. Cuban Jews are no different. Interviews with Cuban Jews confirm that common antisemitism was non-existent. However, oth-

ers such as Professor Irving Horowitz maintain that anti-Israeli attitudes and anti-Zionism, specifically that of the Castro regime, falls nothing short of antisemitism.²¹ Fidel Castro always maintained a respectful attitude toward the Cuban Jewish community. However although he originally supported Israel, that support gradually changed to hostility following the Six-Day War in 1967. Nonetheless, the relationship between anti-Zionism and antisemitism is a complicated one and will be discussed in subsequent sections; however it is imperative that the debate be heard on both sides before conclusions are drawn.

New Jersey resident Arline Hanfling moved to Cuba when she was one-year old and had only happy memories of her childhood in Havana. “There was no problem at all being Jewish and no antisemitism. I belonged to a very Reform temple.”²² Similarly, Carol Siegler of Longboat Key in Florida spent most of her childhood in Havana. Born of Lithuanian descent, her family owned and operated a textile factory and a department store in Havana. In 1906, Jews of Ashkenazi descent founded Cuba’s first synagogue, the United Hebrew Congregation. The following decade saw a large migration of more Ashkenazi Jews as well as Sephardic Jews from Turkey. The Ashkenazi Jews from Eastern Europe used Cuba as a stopover en route to the United States, but due to the lack of antisemitism remained in Cuba and prospered. Their reasons for remaining are noteworthy. Coming from Europe’s hotbed of antisemitism, the lack of prejudice must have come as a welcome surprise to the newly arrived “Polacos.”

The Synagogue of Santiago de Cuba was founded in 1924, (originally called the Jewish Society of Eastern Cuba) consisting mainly of Sephardic Jews from Turkey. This changed in the late 1930s as Ashkenazi Jews from Eastern Europe migrated to Cuba in escape of the Nazis, at which time a Central Jewish Committee was founded. Cuba was a safe haven for Jews until 1939 when President Bru and the Cuban government refused to permit the S.S. Saint Louis to land in Havana harbor. A case for Cuba’s antisemitic policies often begins with the Saint Louis. Supposedly, Nazi agents within Cuba convinced the general public that the refugees aboard were a threat against Cuba and the safety of its citizens. Authorities reported that the Cuban government charged five hundred dollars per refugee to obtain a visa for Cuba. Additionally, the sugar-based economic collapse of the 1920s led to high unemployment, and the emergence of a nationalist movement barring employment of immigrants and prompting Cuba to accept no

21 Cf. I. L. Horowitz, “Cuba, Castro and anti-Semitism,” *Current Psychology* 26, no. 3 (2007): 183–90.

22 R. Wiener, “Few Expect Big Changes as Fidel Castro Departs: Island Ruler’s Reign Was Tough on Israel, Less so on the Jews,” *New Jersey Jewish News*, February 28, 2008, <http://www.njewishnews.com/njnn.com/022808/njFewExpectBigChanges.html> [no longer accessible].

newcomers of any kind or nation.²³ After weeks at port the ship's passengers were denied entrance, forcing the Saint Louis to return to Europe and sentencing its passengers to death.

Those Jews able to find refuge in Cuba during the war started businesses and fared well. Jay Levinson, of John Jay College of Criminal Justice and author of *The Jewish Community of Cuba*, insists that Castro and his government opposed antisemitism and that the Jewish community has always been protected, despite their official position supporting the Palestinians against Israeli occupation and aggression. According to Levinson, Castro differentiates Jews from Israel and asserts that although Jews did suffer economically after the Revolution, it was as members of Cuba's middle class, not as Jews specifically.²⁴ Even in today's Cuba, Jews are free to maintain Jewish traditions and religious rituals. There is availability of kosher products, places of worship, and complete respect for the Jewish community.

Irving Horowitz,²⁵ Rutgers Professor Emeritus and editor of *Cuban Communism, 1959–2003*,²⁶ counters the claim that Castro's anti-Zionist record is not in itself antisemitic sentiment but born out of political and diplomatic relationships. He maintains that anti-Zionism is antisemitism and adds that the 90 percent decline of the Cuban Jewish community soon after 1959 supports his argument. At the time of the Revolution in 1959, Cuba's Jewish population peaked at 15,000 people; today it is estimated at 1,200. Additionally, Cuba provided training camps for Palestinian terrorists and published anti-Israel propaganda.

Horowitz's points are valid, yet even after Cuba severed diplomatic relations with Israel in 1973, Jewish life never disappeared. Jews maintain religious services in synagogues and attend Jewish Sunday schools. The only recorded antisemitism occurring in Cuba was during the Gulf War when Arab students threw stones at *Adas Israel* Synagogue in Havana. Cuban authorities responded quickly, and no one was hurt. In 1991, the Castro regime eased its atheistic policies allowing citizen participation in religious associations. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) sent religious and community leaders to help rebuild the Cuban Jewish communities of Havana, Santiago, and Camaguey.

²³ Cf. M. Bejarano, *The Jewish Community of Cuba: Memory and History*, ed. H. Avni (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2014).

²⁴ Cf. J. Levinson, *Jewish Community of Cuba: The Golden Years, 1906–1958* (Boulder: Westview, 2006).

²⁵ Dr. Horowitz passed away while this paper was being written.

²⁶ Cf. I. L. Horowitz and J. Suchlicki, *Cuban Communism, 1959–2003*, 9th ed. (Piscataway: Transaction, 1998).

B'nai B'rith and a Hadassah women's chapter also provide medicine and other forms of aid to Cuba's Jewish community.

Stuart Cooper of New Jersey and past president of the B'nai B'rith Tri-State Region participates in the Cuban Jewish Relief Project. The United States government allows B'nai B'rith members to travel to Cuba, to supply religious articles and medicine to the Jewish community as well local Cuban hospitals. Despite the dwindling number of Jews in Cuba, Cooper maintains that the Castro regime has never singled out the Jews. Today restrictions on organized religion have eased and Cooper points out that “[the government] allowed people to worship openly without any repercussions, even those who were members of the Communist Party. There is no discrimination permitted in Cuba of any sort.” In 1994, the Jewish Agency provided a \$150 exit fee to over 400 Cuban Jews allowing them to immigrate to Israel, in what is now referred to as Operation Cigar.

Suriname

During World War II, a few Jewish refugees from Europe settled in Suriname. By 1975 after its independence from Holland, Suriname's Jewish population saw a steep decline, which only deepened after civil war broke out in the late 1980s. The current Jewish community consists of only 300 people. In the late 1990s, the Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jewish synagogues in Paramaribo merged and services are actively held in the *Neve Shalom* Synagogue in downtown Paramaribo (*Zedek v' Shalom* is currently rented). Today's Jewish community of Suriname is poor and is currently being upkept by an initiative called Chai Membership. Jacob Steinberg is director of the initiative, which collects donations from members outside of Suriname who wish to donate money to maintain the synagogues, cemeteries, mikvah, and their surrounding grounds.²⁷

Through email correspondence, he explained that the entire structure from the *Aron Kodesh* (holy ark), *Bimah* (dais), the benches, to the beautiful Torahs, are all supported through outside membership and donations. Like the synagogue in Curaçao, the *Neve Shalom Synagogue* boasts a sandy floor as a reminder of the forty years spent in the desert after leaving Egypt, and as a continuation of the *marranos* secret synagogues during the Inquisition when practicing Judaism was a capital crime. The floor had been covered with sand to quiet the sounds of their prayers.

27 Cf. “Welcome to the Suriname Jewish Community!” Suriname Jewish Community, issued 2009, accessed April 12, 2013, <http://www.suriname-jewish-community.com/>.

“There is no antisemitism to speak of in Suriname,” he responded when asked. The *Neve Shalom* Synagogue is open to tourists and community members. It is cared for by a *shamash* (which is the Hebrew word for caretaker) and contains a museum and library. The synagogue grounds also house a community center, the former house of the rabbi, and the first Sephardic cemetery. Since the community no longer has a local rabbi, the former rabbi’s apartment has been renovated and is now rented by guests and tourists. Israel has an honorary consul in Paramaribo.

What Happened to Caribbean Jewry?

What were once vibrant Jewish communities have disintegrated into a handful of Jews. What happened to these communities? Where have all of these Jews gone? Were antisemitic incidents on the various Caribbean Islands grounds for emigration? The remainder of the paper recounts the history of antisemitism from the first arrival of Jews to the Caribbean through the present day, and proposes theoretical explanations for that history with a specific emphasis on the various theories of tolerance. The paper concludes with directions for future research based on the Caribbean model of tolerance.

From Immigration to Emigration and Assimilation: The Quiet Disappearance of Caribbean Jewry

As history has shown, immigration to the Caribbean was ignited by antisemitism. While phenomenally its disappearance stemmed from quite the opposite—a complete lack of antisemitism. Jewish migration to the Caribbean began as a result of the Jewish expulsion decree from Spanish-held lands. The expulsion decree was signed on March 31, 1492, and announced on May 1 (including the kingdoms of Castile, Catalonia, Aragon, Galicia, Majorca, Minorca, the Basque provinces, the islands of Sardinia and Sicily, the kingdom of Valencia, and the kingdom of Andalusia). The Jews were given three months to leave and were required to be out of the country by August 1st. Many of Spain’s Jews paid their way into Portugal only to be expelled again in 1497.²⁸

²⁸ Cf. W. H. Prescott, *History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella the Catholic*, vol. 11 (Boston: American Stationers, 1837).

The “Holy Office of the Inquisition” in Portugal forced the conversion of the Jews who remained to Catholicism where they then lived as “New Christians.” The New Christians of Portugal were not persecuted in the same manner as the *conversos* of Spain, as such the exodus of the Jews from Portugal was unlike the massive one from Spain. The Jewish exodus from Portugal lasted from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth, mostly to Western Europe where the *conversos* returned to Judaism.²⁹

During the seventeenth century, Protestant European countries (with the exception of France) began colonizing the Caribbean Islands. These powers allowed Jews to reconvert from Catholicism to Judaism without persecution, making these colonies a viable option for their settlement. In turn the colonizing powers welcomed the Jews’ expertise in trading, shipping, and banking, as well as their knowledge of Spanish and Portuguese. When Portugal reoccupied the Dutch-held parts of Brazil, in 1654, the Jews left those settlements and reestablished themselves among the main producers of sugar on islands throughout the Caribbean.

By the end of the eighteenth century, Jews were permitted to settle in Spanish-speaking countries. After living for several generations as *conversos* and New Christians, the Spanish-Portuguese Jews in the Caribbean returned to Judaism. They were welcomed, given equal rights and citizenship, and were well respected. The Jews worked to preserve their Spanish language, culture, and traditions. However, the widespread social acceptance of the Sephardic Jews was more detrimental to its preservation than it was beneficial—leading to intermarriage and assimilation. Although the Caribbean Sephardim took pride in their Jewish ancestry and were free to worship, work, and live every aspect of life as they chose, they were losing their Judaism.

In part the decline of Jewish practices during that period had to do with the lack of religious leaders, institutions, and structured communities. Since Judaism in the Spanish-Portuguese colonies had previously been practiced in secret, many Caribbean Jews needed to build religious institutions from scratch and import rabbis and religious leaders from Europe. Many of these rabbis insisted upon strict Orthodox observance, which was already far removed from the Caribbean way of life. The tropical climate and the distances of the Jews from the synagogue made it all but impossible to observe the Sabbath, kosher and dietary laws, and abide by the restrictive modest dress code imposed by Orthodox Jewry. This created resistance toward anything deemed Jewish among the newer gener-

29 Cf. O. R. Constable, *Medieval Iberia: Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

ations, thus alienating them from communal life altogether. Each subsequent generation saw more assimilation and intermarriage.³⁰

Unlike the Jews who settled in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies and remained Jews in secret, the Sephardic Jews from Spain and Portugal who had fled to Amsterdam and then settled in the Dutch, Danish Virgin Islands, French and British Caribbean Islands were never forced to hide their identities and established active Jewish communities. Synagogues were established soon after their arrival, and by the end of the eighteenth century there were over 1,500 Jews on the island of Curaçao alone. Yet only a handful of these families are Jewish today, most are devout Catholics who acknowledge that their ancestors were Dutch Jews.³¹

Another contributing factor to the decline of Caribbean Jewry was the introduction of the Reform movement, which established its own arrangement of prayers and brought its own religious leaders to the islands. English texts replaced Spanish hymns and Sephardic melodies. The synagogue as a cohesive community and family center began to lose meaning.³² In Curaçao specifically, a rift developed in the congregation in 1815 over the new cantor from Amsterdam. The division of the synagogue caused the Sephardic community to spread among the islands and eventually to marry non-Jews.³³

The arrival of Ashkenazi and Middle Eastern Jews raised several issues. First, their arrival pushed the Spanish-Portuguese Jews to further assimilate. The Spanish-Portuguese Jews were among the elite of Caribbean society. They worked as bankers, ship owners, professors, generals, and politicians and did not want to associate with the newcomers.³⁴ Many chose instead to leave the islands or assimilate with non-Jews of their own class and social standing.³⁵

Second many of the newcomers, especially with the advent of Nazism and the Holocaust, immigrated to the Caribbean with the intent to continue on to the United States.³⁶ Most had no intention of establishing communities or maintaining ties. The Jewish refugees were provided a safe haven until they were able

30 Cf. Arbell, *The Jewish Nation of the Caribbean*.

31 Cf. J. C. Goldish, *Once Jews: Stories of Caribbean Sephardim* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2009).

32 Cf. Arbell, *The Jewish Nation of the Caribbean*.

33 Cf. Goldish, *Once Jews*.

34 Cf. Arbell, *The Jewish Nation of the Caribbean*.

35 Cf. Goldish, *Once Jews*.

36 Cf. J. Newman, *Nearly the New World: The British West Indies and the Flight from Nazism 1933–1945* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019).

to obtain visas to the US. Those who did remain soon faced the same challenges as their predecessors, making it difficult to maintain a Jewish way of life.³⁷

Economically, it was no longer feasible to remain on the islands. Firstly, the Caribbean was replaced by Africa and Southeast Asia as a center for the production of sugar, vanilla, cocoa, and other tropical products. Secondly, transatlantic ships no longer needed coal stations. Jewish trading and shipping companies in the region declined and eventually relocated to the United States. This economic situation prompted younger generations to look forward to the higher education and training that American universities offered.³⁸

Explaining the Lack of Antisemitism in the Modern Caribbean: The Psychology of Tolerance

It would seem that the claim “The moon is the only place, where one can be free from antisemitism”³⁹ is wrong—there seems to be no report of classic antisemitism in the Caribbean for over two-hundred years. Here, classic antisemitism is specified because of the anti-Israeli and anti-Zionist attitudes expressed in Cuba after the revolution. However, with the exception of Cuba, there have been no expressions of modern antisemitism or anti-Israeli attitudes either. One could argue that there are no reports of antisemitism because the Jews have all but disappeared. This would be a valid argument except for the fact that historically antisemitism has and continues to exist in societies without Jews.⁴⁰ An alternate and more probable argument would be that the Caribbean is a conglomerate of islands and a multi-cultural society that favors tolerance and acceptance of all regardless of race or religion. In the words of Ralph R. Premdas:

[The Caribbean may be viewed] as an area populated by a diverse polyglot of peoples. There are whites, blacks, browns, yellows, reds, and an assortment of shades in between. There are Europeans, Africans, Asian Indians, Indonesian Javanese, Chinese, Aboriginal Indians, and many mixes. There are Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Rastafarians, Santería, Winti,

37 Cf. Arbell, *The Jewish Nation of the Caribbean*.

38 Cf. *ibid.*

39 H. Arendt, “Ceterum Censeo,” in *Vor Antisemitismus ist man nur noch auf dem Mond sicher* (Munich: Piper, 2000), originally published in *Der Aufbau*, December 26, 1941). Translation by the authors of this article.

40 Cf. “Anti-Semitism Rising Even in Countries with No Jews at All, Secretary-General Tells Event on Power of Education to Counter Racism, Discrimination,” United Nations, issued September 26, 2018, accessed July 7, 2020, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sgsm19252.doc.htm>.

Vudun, etc. They speak in a multitude of tongues—Spanish, English, Dutch, French, English, and a diverse number of Creoles such as papiamentu, sranan tongo, ndjuka, saramaccan, kromanti, kreyol, as well as Hindustani, Bhojpuri, Urdu, etc. In whatever combinations of race, religion, language, and culture they cohere and coexist.⁴¹

From social psychological research, several theories exist that may help explain the extraordinary lack of prejudice experience in the Caribbean: integrated threat theory and the contact hypothesis, the multiculturalism hypothesis, and terror management theory.

Research on political tolerance has consistently found a negative association with perceived threat.⁴² In other words, the greater the cultural threat, the lower the tolerance. Integrated threat theory posits that both realistic threats and symbolic threats to one's social group dissuade tolerance.⁴³ Realistic threats are both economic (epitomized by perceived competition over material and economic group interests) and physical in nature (safety concerns). Symbolic threats are often cultural and focus on group differences in values, norms, and beliefs. Studies have found that in contrast to the US, race, for example, is not a defining factor in the Caribbean despite the shared history of colonialism and slavery.⁴⁴ Out-groups with their different worldview threaten the cultural identity of the in-group and their way of life, thus leading to more negative attitudes and less tolerance toward these groups.⁴⁵

A meta-analysis of over 200 empirical studies examining the contact hypothesis demonstrates that inter-group contact has positive effects on prejudice—frequent contact with out-group members has been shown to increase knowl-

41 R. R. Premdas, "Ethnicity and Identity in the Caribbean: Decentering a Myth," *The Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies Working Paper #234* (1996): 2.

42 Cf. J. L. Sullivan and J. E. Transue, "The Psychological Underpinnings of Democracy: A Selective Review of Research on Political Tolerance, Interpersonal Trust, and Social Capital," *Annual Review of Psychology* 50 (1999): 625–50.

43 Cf. W. G. Stephan and C. W. Stephan, "Cognition and Affect in Stereotyping: Parallel Interactive Networks," in *Affect, Cognition, and Stereotyping: Interactive Processes in Group Perception*, ed. D. M. Mackie and D. L. Hamilton (Orlando: Academic, 1993), 111–36; G. Stephan and C. W. Stephan, *Intergroup Relations* (Boulder: Westview, 1996).

44 Cf. E. K. Bailey, "'I am studying in the US but': Observations and Insights from Caribbean College Students," *Social Identities* 23 (2017): 87–103.

45 Cf. e.g. V. M. Esses et al., "Public Attitudes toward Immigrants and Immigration," in *Canadian Immigration Policy for the 21st Century*, ed. C. M. Beach et al. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2003), 507–36; P. M. Sniderman and L. Hagendoorn, *When Ways of Life Collide: Multiculturalism and its Discontents in the Netherlands* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

edge, liking, and positive affect thereby increasing cultural tolerance.⁴⁶ Additionally, research has shown a relationship between religion and intergroup contact whereby contact is associated with positive attitudes toward outgroups among religious people.⁴⁷

Research also indicates that governments play a role in prejudicial attitudes.⁴⁸ Studies examining political tolerance indicate that promoting democratic beliefs and values, such as equality and civil rights, increases tolerance for cultural diversity thus instilling confidence and a sense of trust and security for both the out-group and in-group. Research explicitly conducted on political controllability and antisemitism demonstrated in four empirical studies that the lack of perceived political control contributes to antisemitic conspiracy theories.⁴⁹

The multiculturalism hypothesis posits that support of cultural diversity leads to increased tolerance toward ethnic out-groups.⁵⁰ Studies in several countries found that endorsement of multi-cultural recognition, increased positive evaluations of out-groups both implicitly and explicitly,⁵¹ and decreased perceptions of group threat⁵² leads to more positive attitudes toward immigrants.

46 Cf. T. F. Pettigrew and L. R. Tropp, "A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90 (2006): 751–83.

47 Cf. G. Piumatti and S. Russo, "Moderators of Linear and Nonlinear Associations between Religiosity, Xenophobia, and Tolerance toward Immigrants in Italy," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 11, no. 4 (2019): 399–407.

48 Cf. S. Marquart-Pyatt and P. Paxton, "In Principle and in Practice: Learning Political Tolerance in Eastern and Western Europe," *Political Behavior* 29 (2007): 89–113; H. McClosky and A. Brill, *Dimensions of Tolerance: What Americans Believe about Civil Liberties* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); Sullivan and Transue, "Psychological Underpinnings of Democracy."

49 Cf. M. Kofta et al., "What Breeds Conspiracy Antisemitism? The Role of Political Uncontrollability and Uncertainty in the Belief in Jewish Conspiracy," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 118, no. 5 (2020): 900–18.

50 Cf. M. Verkuyten, "Ethnic Group Identification and Group Evaluation among Minority and Majority Groups: Testing the Multiculturalism Hypothesis," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 88 (2005): 121–38.

51 Cf. J. A. Richeson and R. J. Nussbaum, "The Impact of Multiculturalism versus Color-Blindness on Racial Bias," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 40 (2004): 417–23, Verkuyten, "Ethnic Group Identification"; C. Wolsko et al., "Framing Interethnic Ideology: Effects of Multicultural and Color-blind Perspectives on Judgments of Groups and Individuals," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 78 (2000): 635–54.

52 Cf. K. Velasco González et al., "Prejudice towards Muslims in the Netherlands: Testing the Integrated Threat Theory," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 47 (2008): 667–85; C. Ward and A.-M. Masgoret, "An Integrative Model of Attitudes toward Immigrants," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 30 (2006): 671–82.

Recent research in terror management theory suggests that thoughts of cultural assimilation serve to reduce cultural threat. According to terror management theory,⁵³ human beings, like all other animals, are driven to survive. Yet unlike other animals, humans are uniquely aware of the inevitability of death and the ever-present potential for lethal experiences, which creates the potential for paralyzing terror. Terror management theory posits that to “manage” this potentially debilitating terror, humans created cultural worldviews (symbolic conceptions of reality shared by individuals in a group) to minimize death anxiety by imbuing the world with order, meaning, and permanence, and by providing a set of standards of valued behavior that, if satisfied, confers self-esteem and ultimately, death transcendence through symbolic and/or literal immortality. Thus, from the perspective of terror management theory, individuals manage their terror by maintaining faith in the cultural worldview and living up to the standards of value that are part of that worldview.

Cultural worldviews require continual validation from others in order to be sustained, especially when confronted with reminders of mortality. This validation occurs mainly through the process of social consensus.⁵⁴ Thus, the mere existence of people with similar worldviews bolsters the individual’s faith in the validity of his or her own worldview, thereby increasing its effectiveness as an anxiety-buffer. Likewise, the mere existence of people with dissimilar worldviews threatens the individual’s faith in his or her own worldview, thereby undermining its effectiveness as an anxiety-buffer. As such, people generally prefer ideas and people that conform to their worldviews and derogate ideas and people that deviate from them.

To date, hundreds of experiments around the world have established the link between death fear and attachment to cultural worldviews. Mortality reminders have increased prejudices toward Blacks, Jews, Muslims, and immigrants among others. These studies strongly suggest that investment in a cultural worldview, and obtaining a strong sense of self-esteem by meeting standards of value within that worldview, shelters people from death concerns; and, conversely, that mortality salience (MS) motivates people to bolster self-esteem and defend their worldviews.

Research exploring the role of mortality salience and political orientation in explaining attitudes in prosocial values demonstrated that following a threat,

53 Cf. J. Greenberg et al., “The Causes and Consequences of a Need for Self-Esteem: A Terror Management Theory,” in *Public Self and Private Self*, ed. R. F. Baumeister (New York: Springer, 1986), 189–212.

54 Cf. L. Festinger, “A Theory of Social Comparison Processes,” *Human Relations* 7 (1954): 117–40.

the importance of benevolent values, which focus on the welfare of people living in close proximity, increases. More importantly, benevolence increased in importance regardless of political orientation.⁵⁵

Additionally, research⁵⁶ suggests that when a differing other is receptive to alternative ideologies (as the Jewish inhabitants of the Caribbean have always been) then MS actually increases assimilation efforts rather than derogation. Studies showed that MS heightened Christians' efforts to assimilate receptive atheists to Christianity, rather than disparage them. These results may shed some light on the lack of antisemitism in the Caribbean. If actively engaging in the assimilation or even learning about a successful assimilation serves terror management then not only should antisemitism disappear, but Jews should be loved and respected among the Caribbean population.

Similar research⁵⁷ conducted on the Hawaiian Islands suggests that the general lack of prejudice there reflects their cultural worldview, or the Hawaiian value referred to as "Aloha Spirit." This value expressed as friendliness, acceptance, and tolerance is credited with affecting acceptance of the various cultures currently represented on the islands. The high rate of intermarriage in Hawaii has also been deemed to positively impact their cultural *tolerance*. Much can be inferred from the Hawaiian Islands to the Caribbean Islands who (1) share a similar "sunny" disposition, and (2) who have an increasingly large rate of intermarriage between Jews and local non-Jewish Islanders.

Conclusions and Directions for Research

This paper aimed to provide insight on the arrival and disappearance of Jews in the Caribbean. From start to finish the paper: (1) highlighted the history of the Jewish migration to various Caribbean Islands; (2) investigated Jewish life in the Caribbean and its disappearance via live interviews and archival data; (3) highlighted the lack of antisemitism experienced by Caribbean Jewry in an

55 Cf. Y. Naveh-Kedem and N. Sverdlik, "Changing Prosocial Values Following an Existential Threat as a Function of Political Orientation: Understanding the Effects of Armed Conflicts from a Terror Management Perspective," *Personality and Individual Differences* 150 (2019): 109494.

56 Cf. S. Kosloff et al., "Mortality Salience Motivates Attempts to Assimilate Differing Others to One's Own Worldview," unpublished manuscript, Michigan State University, 2012.

57 Cf. M. Salzman, "Ethnocultural Conflict and Cooperation in Hawai'i," in *Handbook of Ethnic Conflict: International Perspectives*, ed. D. Landis and R. D. Albert (New York: Springer Science + Business Media, 2012), 21–44.

attempt to explain it; (4) and posited psychological theories of tolerance to account for the lack of Caribbean antisemitism.

Caribbean Jewry is exceptionable on several accounts. For starters, the Caribbean Jewish community transcended space. While the Caribbean is comprised of several independent countries and colonies, the Spanish-Portuguese Jews of the Caribbean considered themselves one community and often referred to themselves as the Caribbean Jewish Nation;⁵⁸ they maintain the oldest Jewish community in the Western hemisphere; its community is marked by a complete lack of classic antisemitism; its established families are large, economically well off, well-educated, and except in name and heritage are no longer Jewish (most have intermarried, assimilated, and converted⁵⁹). The assimilation of the Caribbean Jews took place in less than two-hundred years. On islands such as St. Maarten, they disappeared altogether.

What began as a cohesive unit has gradually disappeared, and today Jewish life in the region is difficult to find. A tour of the Caribbean Islands revealed that there are very few active Spanish-Portuguese communities in the Caribbean (Curaçao and Suriname still maintain the old synagogues), and even fewer new ones (St. Maarten maintains the new Chabad House). These communities while still active have very few congregants, and their members continue to decline. This “comfortable disappearance” devoid of acts of antisemitism and active discrimination is worrisome.

Research must be conducted to examine the underlying causes of such a disappearance. Why would a community given the option to maintain their cultural and religious identity freely chose to abandon it? Could it simply be due to a lack of Jewish education and spiritual leaders as was the case in the late eighteenth century? Or possibly the desire for economic wealth and social standing played a role. But even so, why, when finally given the opportunity to openly practice Judaism, did so few remain Jewish and so many convert to Christianity?

To even begin to scratch the surface of these questions, research must be conducted to differentiate between tolerance/acceptance of difference and tolerance/acceptance of assimilation. During the Inquisition, Jews converted but did not assimilate or truly accept the Christian way of life and continued to practice Judaism in secret and as a result were persecuted. After the Inquisition ended, Jews were not only accepted as Jews but invited into society’s elites as equals. As equals these Jews became open to the ideas of their non-Jewish counterparts and more willing to adopt their cultural norms and worldviews; in reality they

⁵⁸ Cf. Arbell, *The Jewish Nation of the Caribbean*.

⁵⁹ Cf. Goldish, *Once Jews*.

were actively recruited into society and invited to assimilate. Research on assimilation reveals that assimilation is a method of maintaining a dominant identity over out-groups. Instead of distinguishing the in-group from the out-group, members of the out-group are recruited into the in-group.⁶⁰ Assimilation, therefore, maintains prejudice by simply changing members of the in-group through adoption of the cultural norms and worldviews of the in-group. Those who do not assimilate are negatively judged and discriminated against.

A lesson regarding the disappearance of the Caribbean Jews may be inferred from American history. In 1906, the US government passed the Nationality Act mandating that that all immigrants seeking naturalization speak English. By 1923, thirty-four states had laws mandating English-only instruction in schools. The laws were enacted primarily to assimilate immigrants and American Indians. These laws were later rescinded, and in the 1960s the Bilingual Education Act became a federal statute recognizing the discriminatory nature of the previous laws and the importance of maintaining one's cultural identity.⁶¹ Samuel P. Huntington summed up the seriousness of assimilation and identity loss quite well. In a paper critiquing the relationship between immigration and American national identity, Huntington wrote:

When I began to investigate this, my first thought was that we probably have a real problem with immigration. But then I came to the conclusion that no, while there may be an immigration problem, it isn't really a serious problem. The really serious problem is assimilation.⁶²

The question posed earlier in this paper—where have all the Caribbean Jews gone?—may now be considered. The Caribbean Jews who settled on the islands over four-hundred years ago have been assimilated; the newcomers have moved on. Either way they are gone, and without its utility so is antisemitism.

An investigation into Caribbean Jewry can enlighten us about our own communities and future Jewish generations. Jewish intermarriage in the United States is occurring at an alarming rate⁶³ and is decreasing the size of the Amer-

60 Cf. J. F. Dovidio et al., "Why Can't We just Get Along? Interpersonal Biases and Interracial Distrust," *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 8 (2002): 88–102.

61 Cf. N. Cerda and C. M. Hernandez, "Legislation Timeline," *Bilingual Education*, <http://www.freewebs.com/cerda/dz/legislationtimeline.htm>, accessed June 8, 2013. [No longer accessible.]

62 S. P. Huntington, "Reconsidering Immigration: Is Mexico a Special Case?" *Center for Immigration Studies*, issued November 1, 2000, accessed July 3, 2020, <http://www.cis.org/AmericanIdentity-USMexicoImmigrationPolicy>.

63 According to The Jewish Federations of North America (2013) the rates of intermarriage have increased from 13% in 1970 to 47% in 2001.

ican Jewish population. In 1997, Alan Dershowitz tackled this problem in his book, *The Vanishing American Jew*. Noting that assimilation is on the rise, he observed that because Jews have spent thousands of years surrounded by enemies looking to convert or exterminate them, they've become collectively defensive against antisemites but not against internal actions and inactions destructive to Jewish survival. He suggests that in order to survive, the Jewish people must adapt to new internal necessities and acknowledge the demographic challenges of intermarriage, assimilation, low birthrates, and the breakdown of neighborhoods and communities.⁶⁴

Additionally, American Jews have become divided. There are political, religious, and cultural differences among American Jews.⁶⁵ The Ultra-Orthodox Jews believe that their way of religion is the only strand of Judaism that can survive while the political Zionists believe religion is outdated, and culture remains important to the survival of Judaism. Others believe that American Jews are like any other American group and Jewish tradition and ethics will keep Judaism alive. Some believe that Jewish organizations are enough, and others say that Jewish education is key.⁶⁶ Unfortunately, this divide has become an obvious part of the problem. Jewish identity must evolve beyond antisemitism, religion, and politics to form a united comprehensive identity inclusive of all Jews. Otherwise, if this trend continues, how long will it take for American Jewry to disappear the way Caribbean Jewry has? This is a question for all Jewish communities to consider and can serve as an example for other communities in similar situations.

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⁶⁴ Cf. A. M. Dershowitz, *The Vanishing American Jew: In Search of Jewish Identity for the Next Century* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1997).

⁶⁵ Cf. L. A. Kotler-Berkowitz, "The Structure of Political Divisions among American Jews," *Contemporary Jewry* 37, no. 1 (2017): 5–27.

⁶⁶ Cf. e.g. the Jewish Community Center of Greater Baltimore, <https://jcc.org/>, accessed July 9, 2020.

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