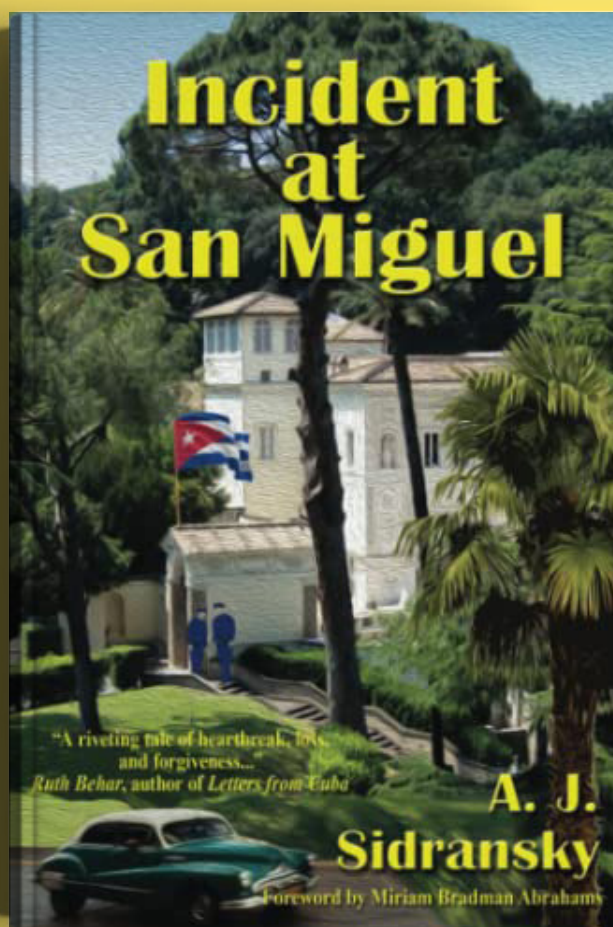


JBC Book Clubs Discussion Guide

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Sidransky
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Author's Note

When writing historical fiction we authors have a very specific goal in mind: to transport the reader to a time and place, and into the mind of a character, that they themselves can't go to. The key to the experience of great historical fiction is to feel like you're there. With that in mind, we take some liberties. In the case of this book, *Incident at San Miguel*, there was no incident at San Miguel del Padron.

Though the incident described in the book is completely fictitious, the Cuban Revolution was not. The historical personages mentioned in this book, Fidel Castro, Raul Castro, Che Guevara, and Fulgencio Batista, were real. The characters of Aaron and Moises Cohan and their wives and families are based on real people and real events, but the remainder of the characters in this book are purely fictitious.

For those who are not familiar with the Cuban Revolution, it occurred in the 1950s and culminated in the defeat of Fulgencio Batista, the dictator of Cuba, on New Year's Eve, December 31, 1958-January 1, 1959. It was led by Fidel Castro and was known as the 26 of July Movement. The beginning of the uprising is generally considered to be the attack on the Moncada Barracks on 26 July 1953.

Fidel and his brother Raul were the leaders of the movement and the government that resulted from the revolution's victory for more than sixty years. Born in Birán, near Santiago de Cuba, they were from a prosperous, land-owning family. Fidel was born in 1926, Raul in 1931.

Che Guevara, the purported architect of the socialist approach to Cuba's post-revolutionary path, was the scion of a wealthy family as well. He was born in Rosario, Argentina in 1928 and was trained as a physician. He led revolutionary movements throughout Latin America, including Bolivia where he died in 1967.

Fulgencio Batista was born in Veguita in 1901. Unlike his revolutionary antagonists, he came from a humble background. He led a revolt known as the Sergeants' Revolt in 1933. Batista came to power officially 1940, originally as a reformer. In 1952, running behind in the presidential race, he staged a coup and established himself as Cuba's leader. He remained Cuba's 'President', until he was ousted by Castro. He was known for his corruption, cruelty, and his connections to the American Mafia.

I have written extensively about life under fascist regimes in my novels. This book is my first foray into life under communist rule. I have to admit that I came into this project with a bias. I am far to the left politically, and I have long thought that communist regimes are judged unfairly by American observers. These observers focus on the repressive nature of communism, while rarely acknowledging its achievements in areas like education, health care, and housing. I have traveled extensively in the third world in both communist and capitalist systems. The level of poverty I saw in Peru, for instance, far exceeded what I saw in China. With that said, during the writing of this book I traveled to Hungary, Czechia, and Slovakia with my son to see where my grandparents were born and to visit with family there. These distant cousins are all that's left of a family that once numbered in the hundreds throughout these countries. My family was a victim of the Nazi Holocaust. To me, fascism was the enemy and the danger, not communism. It still is.

While in Budapest we visited a museum known as the Museum of Terror. In the spirit of transparency I should note that this museum is the brainchild of Victor Orban, the current prime minister of Hungary, and poster child for modern-day fascism. His view of Hungarian history is tailor-made to promote his view of Hungary's future. In the case of this museum, Hungary holds no responsibility

for its fascist history before and during World War II. Instead, he portrays Hungary as the victim of both the Nazis and then the Soviet Union in a continuous occupation from 1944, when the Nazis invaded Hungary, through 1989, when the Soviets left and communism collapsed.

I found this visit to be an epiphany. What I learned was that while communism and fascism may have diametrically opposed economic systems, they share identical systems of social control. There is no place within either system for free thought. Individual freedoms are subjugated to the needs and desires of the state. And, as in all totalitarian systems, there is always a boogey man. In the case of the Nazis and the Hungarian Fascists in the 1930s and 1940s that boogeyman was the Jews. In the case of communist systems, including Castro's Cuba, the boogeyman is the entrepreneurial or capitalist class. In the absence of a religious, ethnic, or racial minority to blame for the nation's problems, communism points its finger at an economic class to which it ascribes the suffering of the people and the nation. Sadly, what achievements these systems may have made pale in comparison to the repression they impose on their populations through what can only be described as terror.

A. J. Sidransky
New York
October 2022

Foreword

Miriam Bradman Abrahams

Growing up in 1960's Brooklyn, the Cuban-born daughter of Cuban-Jewish refugees, my parents' experiences shaped my identity. To begin, as a native Spanish speaker, I felt quite different from my classmates, mostly children of Yiddish speaking Holocaust survivors and second generation Americans. My dad sounded charmingly like Ricky Ricardo.

My parents valued education above all else. Brooklyn's public schools were not the best back then. Our parents chose to enroll my sister and me in Jewish day school. How I think, speak and react today, what I cook and eat, how I communicate with my parents, my husband, grown kids, and community are a direct result of being tri-lingual and tri-cultural.

My grandparents were exiled from their own parents' cold, dangerous shtetl life in Poland and Belarus in the 1920's and 1930's to a tropical island that welcomed them. They began with nothing but hope and a desire to survive and succeed. That success required a new language and way of living life, while retaining their heritage and customs as best as possible. With few resources they nonetheless succeeded, raising and providing for their children. Their children, my parents, knew only Cuba.

My grandparents owned their own businesses. My father and his brother attended university. My mother and her sister were raised in the Jewish community but worked in the larger society. They imagined their futures in Cuba. Little was spoken about the old country, about the epic loss of loved ones due to poverty and war, or about the intense pain of separation. My parents knew close to nothing about their grandparents' lives and fates. They've told me, that like the fourth child in the Passover seder, they didn't even know how or what to ask and deeply regret their lack of knowledge about their own personal histories. My mother had only a hint of what happened to her father's family

when a letter arrived from overseas and he retreated to another room to read and weep.

In the late 1950's, when signs of intense political change and growing fears about their future in Cuba seeped into their daily lives, my parents, then in their twenties, were faced with making serious decisions similar to the ones their own parents made in their youth. They would leave behind all they knew for another climate, language and culture. They could barely imagine the enormity of what faced them. This leaving and arriving, setting down roots and then suddenly having to pull them up to survive, has been part of Jewish DNA for millennia. It is the biblical story of Abraham, Noah, Joseph and Moses.

From my great love of reading historical fiction, I've always known that each person, each family, has a unique story to tell. It's a story from which their children and grandchildren may glean something useful. An emotion, a lesson, a way to move forward. My parents ingrained their own stories in my memory, thus creating a strong desire for me to see for myself where I was born, a place I left at the age of two, long before I could form my own memories. I imagined the world where they lived and laughed and dreamed as young people, the tropical colors and rhythms of the unknown island only ninety miles away from the southernmost tip of Florida. More importantly, I wanted to meet my uncle and his family on their own turf, to see the flip side of what I had been told and what my life might have been like.

My father refused to return to Cuba. He had deep-seated fear about his safety and by extension mine in the communist system that he escaped. He insisted there was nothing for him there and it wasn't worth the risks. My aunt's stories about her wonderful first visit to Cuba when it reopened to Americans, and then reading Ruth Behar's first book, *An Island Called Home: Returning to Jewish Cuba*,

about her journey to explore her own roots, further ignited my desire.

After some years of coaxing, explaining that I would go anyway but preferred the option of seeing it with the nostalgia of a parent at my side, my mother's sense of curiosity won out. She generously financed my dream trip, and finally, through the advice of June Safran, a Cuba mission leader, my mom, sister and I joined a Jewish humanitarian mission to Cuba during Chanukah, December 2008. At the time, group travel was the only legal entry for us. It required a sheaf of intricate forms, substantial fees, and plenty of red tape. The trip was led by Miri Saul, an expat like me, who also left as a child. My father implored us not to mention his name or talk openly about our opinions.

Our family was separated by distance and politics for forty years. I treasured black and white photos of my first birthday in Havana in January 1962, taken days before my parents and I secretly fled to the United States. I didn't know much about my three first-cousins, except that one had a chronic illness. The same was true of my uncle. I knew only that he was a communist idealist, had chosen to stay, and had been married twice.

In 1998, my parents relayed the nearly unbelievable news from my uncle that my first cousin - a computer programmer in Cuba, as I was in New York - had access to a work email address. While he now had email access, he, like most Cubans, had no outside internet news sources. I excitedly jumped on this opportunity, and slowly he and I go to know each other.

I was very cautious in my questions. Anyone could be reading our correspondence. U.S.-Cuban relations were fraught with suspicion and possible danger for my cousin. He asked me to tell him about our grandparents whom he'd never met as he was born after they left Cuba, never to return.

Eduardo and his brother, Osvaldo, soon left Cuba. Eduardo to Israel as a new immigrant, and Osvaldo to Spain through a familial connection with financial support from my parents. After announcing their intent to leave Cuba, life became even more difficult for them. They lost their jobs, suffered from a feeling of otherness, and worried about the possibility of endangering those family members who remained.

When the Cuban government opened travel for Cuban citizens to the United States in 2001, my father sponsored his brother Salomon and Salomon's wife to spend a month in Brooklyn. My cousin Eduardo, now living in Israel and engaged to be married, timed a visit to stay with us on Long Island at that same time. My parents, sister, and I, along with my aunt and uncle, celebrated Eduardo's and Haya's civil wedding at the courthouse in downtown New York City. It was an amazing reunion, especially for me. I relished the excitement of rediscovering my long lost family.

When I met my uncle for the first time, I felt a visceral connection to him. He looked exactly like my grandfather, though way taller, and just like he did in the photo I had of him holding me as an infant in Havana, only a little older. Though we spoke little of substance, I basked in the togetherness. I knew that he felt connected to me as well. After that, we met in Cuba in 2008, and once in Israel as well.

When my uncle passed away in 2012, I grieved that so much time had been lost. I wrote a personal piece about it for *Tablet* magazine. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Guanabacoa outside Havana. My husband and kids and I visited his grave with my aunt and cousin in 2016. My aunt, my cousins, and I continue to strengthen our connection with each email or WhatsApp. It is truly a miracle that we can do this so easily now. To date, I still don't know much about the forty years our family lived apart in radio silence. My uncle was loathe to speak openly about his experiences. When asked, he gently brushed my questions off. I understood this to be a reaction to his life under communism where one is watched closely.

My cousin Eduardo raised a beautiful family with his wife in Israel. He recently passed away, much too young, after a short difficult battle with cancer. I am grateful for the 21 years we shared together. His brother Osvaldo lives in Spain with his wife and children, and we hope to meet up again here or there. My aunt and a few other family members remain in Cuba.

I related my story to author A. J. Sidransky, whose books I reviewed for the Jewish Book Council. As a fluent Spanish speaker with connections to the Dominican Republic and a grandson of refugees himself, I knew he could connect emotionally to my story. As a fiction writer he could fill in the gap of so many missing years with his creative

touch. He melded some of the facts of my family's time in Cuba and the difficulty of their emigration with purely fictional events and people. I am grateful for A. J.'s ability to grasp the different personality types and how each was affected by critical decisions made. I provided him with pages of interviews I did with my parents. He then visited and conducted his own detailed interviews at my parents' home and gleaned even more information than I was able to gather. He also recorded the interviews for posterity.

I am sure that this story will offer insight into the serious hardships experienced by immigrant families and their long-term effects. I am grateful for my father's foresight and decision-making, my mother's courage and adaptability, my sister's everlasting companionship and support, and my husband's and children's love and understanding. I sincerely hope that no reader will mistake the fictionalized parts as real. Please read the historical notes and author's notes and acknowledgments before you read the book to understand what's real and what's fiction. I ardently hope the reader will sense the fears and hopes, the desire to preserve family and identity, the need to pursue one's truth while maintaining *shalom bayit* - peace in one's home and heart that this story, my story, offers.

With deep love and care for my whole family I dedicate this story to my uncle Salomon and my cousin Eduardo.

Con cariño por toda mi familia, le dedidico esto para mi tio Salomon y su hijo, mi primo Eduardo

Miriam Bradman Abrahams

October 2022

Long Beach, New York

Books Q&A :

Jewish Book Council in conversation with AJ Sidransky

JBC: What compelled you to write about the Cuban Revolution?

AJ Sidransky: I'm always looking for a good story. When I wrote *Forgiving Maximo Rothman*, I met Miriam Bradman Abrahams through Jewish Book Council. She wrote the review for JBC. Over the years we became friends. I became aware of her personal history. She was born in Cuba and escaped shortly after Castro's revolution with her family. Miriam approached me with her family story and after some preliminary interviews with her parents I decided their story was perfect for me. My knowledge of authoritarian regimes, my interest in diverse Jewish communities, and my personal experiences in the Spanish Caribbean, ability to speak Spanish and comfort within that culture, combined to make this the perfect story for me to tackle.

JBC: Many books have been written about the Cuban Revolution, both fiction and non-fiction. How is your work different?

AJ: What sets *Incident at San Miguel* apart from other novels about the Cuban Revolution is that it's centered on the Cuban-Jewish experience specifically, and that it's central story is focused on how the revolution split families, yet poses the question of what comes first, your obligation to your personal beliefs, or to your family, despite differences in those beliefs. As Ruth Behar said about it, "we see the Cuban Revolution in an entirely new light..." While the experience of the revolution is not unique to Jewish Cubans, the book also examines how the revolution

affected a thriving community and ultimately sent it into exile, as well as how durable the Jewish-Cuban identity is.

As concerns the retelling of history in fiction as opposed to non-fiction, I believe fiction is a better medium for transmitting the emotional aspects of an experience than a history, biography, or even a memoir in many cases. That's not to say reading a memoir, biography, or history isn't worthwhile. What historical fiction gives a reader is a unique perspective. Fiction puts the reader into the head of the character. The reader literally feels what the character feels. It is the closest we can get to time travel. If I've done my job well, you'll cry when the character cries, you'll laugh when she laughs, and you'll be terrified when she's terrified.

JBC: What kind of stories do you seek?

AJ: I seek stories that celebrate the human condition, the ability to rise above what might destroy us. I write about ordinary people faced with extraordinary circumstances. Meet the moment, triumph over adversity.

I hear lots of stories. How do I know which one will make a great novel? By how drawn-in I become when hearing it. A lot also depends on how nonchalant the teller of the story is. For instance, in this story, *Incident at San Miguel*, when Juan Bradman told me, as if it were nothing unusual, that he had met Che Guevara and challenged him I knew I had a story.

JBC: Did anything about the story behind *Incident at*

San Miguel change your view of the world or history?

AJ: Yes, researching and interviewing for this book did change my basic world view. To be perfectly honest, I have always been on the left politically. In many ways I can be considered a socialist. As such, I've always felt that communist and socialist systems have received a biased and unfair rap in capitalist versions of history. On a trip to China in 1986 I noted that children weren't begging in the streets, everyone was literate, housing, education and medical care were available to everyone. This contrasted starkly with my experiences traveling in Peru, Mexico, and Haiti, where poverty was both obvious and excruciating.

I've written extensively about the Holocaust and have cautioned readers through my work that the real enemy, especially for us Jews, is fascism. It's quicksand that will surely swallow us whole. Researching this book I came to understand things about communist systems I had overlooked before, perhaps conveniently. This revelation came to me in the most unlikely of places. Budapest, Hungary.

On a trip with my adult son to visit and discover the places where my grandparents were born we visited a museum on Budapest known by the name, The House of Terror. This museum, to be fair, was the brainchild of Victor Orban, the current prime minister of Hungary and the poster boy for today's version of fascism, "illiberal democracy." His message was suspect from the outset.

The museum is located in the former grand city mansion of a wealthy Hungarian Jewish family. The home was confiscated by the Nazis in 1944 and immediately converted to the Budapest headquarters of the Gestapo. Their torture chambers are located in the basement. When the Nazis fled in 1945, the building was immediately turned over the Hungarian communist secret police.

Orban's alternative reality erases the lines between fascism and communism and views Hungary as an occupied nation from 1944-1989. Of course, that's simply not true. What I did come to understand

though was that while the two systems may have diametrically opposed economic systems, they share the same system of social control. No dissent is permitted. There is only one, unified, acceptable way to think. That is the great tragedy of communism. Despite what communist systems such as Castro's may have accomplished for the betterment of their people, those accomplishments are dwarfed, eclipsed, by the loss of all personal freedom and the enlistment of large numbers of citizens to inform on their neighbors, friends, family, and co-workers.

JBC: What real events are *Incident at San Miguel* based on?

AJ: *Incident at San Miguel* is based on the real-life relationship between brothers Juan and Solomon Bradman and their families in Cuba from just before the revolution through Juan's escape with his family in 1962 and the 2001 reunion of the brothers in New York City. I like to leave the reader with the task of determining what events are real and what has been fictionalized. I suggest that readers read both Miriam Bradman Abrahams' Foreword, and my Historical Notes at the beginning of the book, and the Acknowledgements at the end of the book to get a fuller picture of what's real and what's been fictionalized. I will give the reader this advance notice. The Cuban Revolution is real. It happened. The actual incident at San Miguel is not. That's literary license.

JBC: Do you intend to write more books about the Cuban Revolution?

AJ: In all likelihood, no, I won't write another book about the Cuban Revolution. Unless someone brings me a story so good I can't say no. I'm often asked this question about writing another Holocaust Book. At this juncture, I have no hard plans for another Holocaust book, though I do have an

idea for one lurking in my head. It's saying, "write me," and I'm saying, "I need a break," so, the next project is a book about baseball. A novel. The story is about a young Dominican boy who makes it to

the major leagues through the Dominican baseball academies. I just spent a month in the Dominican Republic researching it. And it's based on the son of a friend there who signed with the majors last year.

JBC: Much of your work has a Latin slant. What's that about?

AJ: As you may know my uncle was a refugee from the Nazis in Sosua, Dominican Republic. His experiences were the basis for *Forgiving Maximo Rothman*. I've been connected to the Dominican Republic all my life. I visit there each winter. My best friend is Dominican. I stay at his home and immerse myself in that world. It's a great way to disconnect and recharge. One friend says about me, "he was born in the wrong country!" I feel very connected when I'm there, to a simpler way of life. It inspires me.

JBC: Is there one thing you'd like for your work to accomplish out in the world?

AJ: Yes, of course, actually two. One is to touch my readers, to keep them connected to the ultimate humanity of good people. When someone tells me they are moved by my work, it makes me feel it's all so worthwhile.

JBC: What's the second?

AJ: I'd like my books to be made into series on Netflix or Amazon, Hulu, HBO, or whatever. I'm not picky, so if you know anyone, please pass that along.

Discussion Questions

1. The central theme of *Incident at San Miguel* is our responsibility to family and how that responsibility can affect our lives. What do you consider to be your responsibility to family and friends? How far would you go to protect them?
2. Did Aaron do the right thing by helping Moises to evade the Batista regime? How would Moises's life have been different if he had been arrested by Batista's forces?
3. The author writes about ordinary people faced with extraordinary circumstances. What do you think you would have done if faced with a situation like that of the Cohan brothers, and Cuban Jewry in general, in 1960. How would you react to the unexpected or the unthinkable today? What would cause you to flee your country?
4. Aaron and Moises's father, Raphael, rejects Ana Teresa because she isn't Jewish. The fact that she's a communist is a secondary problem. Yet having a close relative in a high position in the new government could help the family. What are your thoughts about this?
5. The Cuban Jewish community, unlike those in Europe during the Nazi period, was secure and only rarely experienced antisemitism. They were not targeted by the Castro regime for their Jewish identity, rather for being part of the entrepreneurial class. Given the political currents in the United States today, and the commensurate rise in antisemitic incidents in the past few years, should American Jews be prepared to seek alternatives? What can we do to stabilize and defend our position in American society?
6. Was Aaron set up by the communist regime when he received permission to leave? Could you imagine making the tough decisions he was forced to make concerning his wife's and child's status?
7. Do you think Fidel Castro's communism brought any positive changes to Cuba and at what price?
8. In the end, despite his dedication to the cause for more than forty years, was Moises satisfied with what Castro and communism brought to Cuba? Did it serve him and his family well? Did he regret the choices he made?
9. Raul learns about his heritage and decides to make *Aliyah*. What do you believe is the eternal pull of Jewish heritage, especially to those not raised with its traditions? Consider those who discover they are Jewish through DNA testing or through uncovered documents, or the case of Latinos whose ancestors were forced to convert to Catholicism during the Spanish Inquisition and 500+ years later rediscover their Jewish roots because of unusual traditions they've kept up for generations.
10. In my debut novel, *Forgiving Maximo Rothman*, the title character meets Rafael Trujillo. In *The Interpreter*, the protagonist, Kurt Berlin meets Adolf Hitler. Che Guevara plays a pivotal role in both the book and the true events behind this story. What do

you think it would be like to have actually met a giant of history?

11. When Aaron and Beatriz emigrated to the United States they faced many challenges and became more religiously observant out of necessity. How difficult do you think that was for them? What would you have done in this situation? Did they miss their Cuban Jewish way of life?

12. Why do you think the older generation and others stayed in Cuba, despite the extreme changes brought about by the revolution?

13. Considering the fact that the family was separated for forty years by the US Embargo against the Cuban government, can the reader differentiate which parts of the story are fiction and which are factual?

14. Consider your own school education and current knowledge about the island nation of Cuba, only ninety miles from Florida's Keys and a quick forty minute flight from Miami. Did you know much about the political turmoil between the countries and how each American President has dealt with this issue? Do you know about the 1980 exodus of the Marielitos or remember the 1999 Elian Gonzalez custody case? Do you think the relationship between the USA and Cuba could or should be different today?

15. Were you satisfied with the novel's ending or would you have preferred reading more about whether or how the relationship between Aaron and Moises continued?

Recipe: Ropa Vieja

Recipe courtesy of Daniel Gritzer, from [Serious Eats](#)



Photo credit: Alejandro Robaina/[Flickr](#)

Ingredients

1/2 pound beef flank steak
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
3 tablespoons vegetable oil, plus more if needed
1 large yellow onion, sliced
3 red, yellow, and/or orange bell peppers, stemmed, seeded, and thinly sliced
8 medium cloves garlic, minced
1 tablespoon tomato paste
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon dried oregano
1/2 teaspoon ground allspice
1/2 cup dry white wine
1 can peeled whole tomatoes in their juices, crushed
1 cup homemade or store-bought chicken stock, plus more if needed
2 bay leaves

1 medium carrot, halved crosswise
1 celery rib, halved crosswise
1/2 cup pimento-stuffed olives, sliced into thirds
1 small handful chopped cilantro leaves and tender stems
Cooked rice and pinto or black beans, for serving

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Cut flank steak into large pieces that will fit on the bottom of a Dutch oven in 2 batches. Season with salt and pepper. Heat oil in Dutch oven over medium-high heat until shimmering. Working in batches, add steak and cook, turning, until browned, about 6 minutes per batch. Transfer steak to a plate and set aside.
- 2 Add onion and bell peppers to Dutch oven and cook, stirring and scraping up browned bits from bottom of pot, until onion and peppers are tender, about 8 minutes. Add garlic and cook for 1 minute longer;

lower heat and/or add more oil at any point if ingredients threaten to burn.

3. Stir in tomato paste, cumin, oregano, and allspice and cook, stirring and scraping, for 1 minute.

4. Add white wine and bring to a simmer, scraping up any browned bits from bottom of pot. Boil until raw alcohol smell has cooked off from wine, about 2 minutes, then add canned tomatoes and stock. Return beef to pot, nestling it under the liquid among onions and peppers, along with any of its accumulated juices. Nestle bay leaves, carrot, and celery into pot. Add more stock, just enough to cover all the ingredients, if necessary.

5. Cover Dutch oven and transfer to oven, then let cook until beef is very tender, about 1 1/2 hours.

6. Remove bay leaves, carrot, and celery from pot and discard. Remove beef from pot and, using 2 forks, pull apart into very thin, long shreds. Return beef to pot, stirring to combine with vegetables and cooking liquid.

7. Stir in olives, return Dutch oven to medium heat, and simmer until juices have reduced just enough to coat the beef in a rich, saucy glaze. Season with salt and pepper. Stir in cilantro, then serve with rice and beans.

Recipe: Cuban Picadillo

Recipe courtesy of Ingrid Hoffmann, from [Food Network](#)



Photo credit: Susan Filson/[Flickr](#)

Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 large yellow onion, finely chopped (about 2 cups)
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 pound ground beef or combination of beef chorizo, and pork
- 1/3 cup dry white wine or dry sherry
- 10 cherry tomatoes, chopped or 1 can diced tomatoes with juice
- 1/3 cup tomato paste
- 1/3 cup chopped pimento stuffed Spanish olives with 1 tablespoon brine from jar
- 1/3 cup raisins
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 2 teaspoons ground cumi
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper, optional
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Directions

1. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add onion, garlic, and bay leaves and saute until onion is soft, stirring frequently, about 4 minutes.
2. Add ground beef to skillet and cook until browned. Once the meat is browned, carefully away from the flame, tilt pan and remove excess fat with a large spoon.
3. Add the white wine and stir for another minute. Then add the chopped cherry tomatoes, tomato paste, pimento stuffed Spanish olives, raisins, dried oregano, cumin and cayenne pepper. Simmer over low heat for another 8 minutes, stirring occasionally. Season with salt and pepper.
4. Serve warm

Recipe: Cuban Style Yuca with Mojo

Recipe courtesy of [Kitchen De Lujo](#)



Photo credit: Leslie Seaton/[Flickr](#)

Ingredients

- 1 lb yuca (cassava) peeled & halved
- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 8 cloves garlic minced
- 1 small onion sliced rings
- 1/3 cup naranja agria (bitter orange) juice
- 1 tbsp salt
- 1/2 lb chicharrón (pork belly) optional
- cilantro for garnish finally chopped

Directions

1 Start by peeling the yuca (cassava) skin and cut into medium sized wedges. Place chopped yuca (cassava) wedges into a large pot and add water until wedges are completely covered. Bring to boil and add two teaspoons of salt into water for 5 minutes. Bring to simmer, cover the pot, and set aside for 20 minutes or until yuca (cassava) chunks are soft.

2. In a medium-sized saucepan, add the chicharrónes and fry until golden brown. set aside chicharrónes onto a wire rack or plate with paper towel. sauté onion rings for 3 minutes then add olive oil to saucepan. Bring oil to simmer while adding the minced garlic, naranja agria (bitter orange) juice, and remaining salt. Stir continuously for five to seven minutes.
3. To serve, place soft yuca (cassava) wedges on to plate or bowl, remove the fibrous core of the yuca if any, pour mojo garlic sauce over the yuca, and add chopped up fried chicharrónes. Garnish with cilantro and add salt for taste.

Recipe: Fufu de Platano

Recipe courtesy of [Kitchen De Lujo](#)



Photo credit: Arelys Jimenez/[Flickr](#)

Ingredients

- 3 Green Plantains Large
- 1 White Onion Medium
- 4 tbl Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- 1 tsp Black Pepper
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 4 cups Chicken Stock
- Lemon little bit of juice

Directions

1. Cut ends of off the plantains and peel. Cut them into chunks. You may find it easier to cut them first and then peel.
2. Bring the plantains to a boil, then lower heat, cover and simmer until tender. This will typically take 20 to 30 minutes. Test with fork for tenderness. Keep the bananas in broth until you are ready to mash them.
3. In a separate pan cook onions in olive oil for 3 to 5 minutes on low heat. Add garlic and sauté for a few

more minutes. Mash the bananas with the broth (add 1/2 of a cup of broth or water at a time until desired consistency – should be like mashed potatoes.) Add in oil, onions and garlic. Add in lemon juice and season with salt and pepper to taste. I personally also like to add some chopped fresh parsley or cilantro.

4. Serve as a side dish or you can top with bacon bits, pork cracklings (Chicharrón) or masas de puerco (fried pork chunks) and have as a meal.

Suggestion from AJ Sidransky: Top it with fried eggs, fried salami, or fried cheese.

Recipe: Flan

Recipe courtesy of [Kitchen De Lujo](#)



Photo credit: David Curry/[Flickr](#)

Ingredients

1 cup white sugar (divided) use 1/2 cup now then 1/2 cup for caramel later

1 can sweetened condensed milk

4 eggs

2 can evaporated milk

2 tsp vanilla extract

Directions

1. Using flan pot or 2 quart pot with tight fitting lid, place 1/2 cup sugar in pot and caramelize sugar. (do this by melting sugar over medium heat (stirring constantly) until melted and amber in color. Remove from the stove with hot pad and move caramel around on sides of pot (only half way up pot)

2. Mix eggs with other 1/2 cup sugar, milk and vanilla and mix well. (I do this with blender don't have to though). Place egg mixture in flan/pot or 2 quart pot cover with flan pot lid or if using 2 quart pot place Aluminum foil tightly over pot and place lid on top.

3. place pot into another pot big enough to hold the flan pot or 2 quart pot and fill with water until about 1 1/2 inch of water covers sides of smaller pot.

4. Bake at 350 degrees for at least 1 hour. but to ensure that flan is done remove lid and stick kitchen knife in center of flan if it comes out clean it's done. Remove pot from water pot and cool completely.

5. When flan has cooled remove lid/foil and place a dish or plate that is bigger than the top of the flan pot on top, make sure the plate has a small lip as caramel will run. Place one hand on bottom of pot and one hand on top of plate and turn upside down on platter. serve or place in refrigerator covered until serving.

Links for Further Study

For more on the Cuban Revolution

[Visit the linked wikipedia page](#)

[Visit the linked britannica page](#)

For more on Cuban's politican leaders

[Visit the linked wikipedia page on Fidel Castro](#)

[Visit the linked wikipedia page on Raul Castro](#)

[Visit the linked wikipedia page on Che Guevara](#)

[Visit the linked wikipedia page on Fulgencia Batista](#)

For more on Cuban Jewry and Castro's relationship with Cuba's Jewish community

[Visit the linked wikipedia page on Cuban Jewry](#)

[Moment magazine's article by Irene Shaland](#)

[Times of Israel article by Josefin Dolsten](#)

For more on Miriam Bradman Abrahams

[Tablet magazine's article by Miriam B. Abrahams](#)

[The Jewish Star's article by Miriam B. Abrahams](#)

[Liherlad.com's article by Miriam B. Abrahams](#)

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