

Photographs by  
Randi Sidman-Moore

# Lox With Black Beans & Rice: Portraits of Cuban Jews in South Florida

Jewish Museum of Florida  
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## Educator's Resource Guide

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### Introduction to the Exhibit

“Lox with Black Beans and Rice” is a photo exhibit by Randi Sidman-Moore, an internationally recognized photojournalist. The exhibit of 30 large-scale, black-and-white and color photographs is the result of four years of work. The images are a first-hand look into the lives of Cuban-American Jews residing in South Florida – candid photos of subjects performing daily tasks and rituals, providing an intimate view of a community that began five decades ago, when most of the then 12,000-strong community managed to flee Cuba with the communist takeover in 1959.

“I was privileged to be the quiet observer of their daily lives, sharing in their private moments,” says Sidman-Moore. “My goal in this exhibit is to paint a vivid personal picture of this unique cultural landscape, in an attempt to refute Miami’s image of ‘glitz and glamour’ that is perpetuated throughout popular culture.”

Randi Sidman-Moore’s photographs are an example of diversity within one cultural landscape. They allow us to investigate a distinct group within South Florida’s multicultural community as they live their family lives, their community lives and their American lives. We find ourselves examining how their lives are different from or similar to ours, and what it is like for them to live outside of not one, but two or more, diasporas.

The “Jewban” community, as it is commonly called, instantly captured Sidman-Moore’s imagination. Cuban Jewish families granted the artist access to their everyday lives, often allowing her to photograph them for hours at a time. Included in the exhibit are cross-cultural images of private ceremonies, Shabbat dinners, people in a wide variety of careers and in the midst of celebration and worship.

The show reflects a growing interest in Cuban Jewish life and the complicated stories behind the multi-diasporic people depicted in the photographs.

## **Who is Randi Sidman-Moore?**

Randi Sidman-Moore is a native of Great Neck, New York and has resided in Miami for 15 years. She studied photography at Skidmore College in New York and Studio Art Centers International in Florence, Italy. In 2001, she received the *Nikon International Award* from a field of 35,000 submissions for her photo essay and exhibition, "Family." Sidman-Moore was a regular contributor to *Elle Magazine's* lifestyle section, and her cover and ad photos have appeared in numerous publications, including *Time Magazine*, *Cosmopolitan* and *The Miami Herald*.

In the late 1990s, photographer Sidman-Moore was on a trip to Israel and Jordan with the Greater Miami Jewish Federation when she lost her spot in the crowded media bus. Call it divine intervention... She ended up in a bus loaded with Cuban Jews from Miami -- a twist of fate that launched her on a journey into a unique culture and a years-long project to document one of South Florida's lesser-known communities.

"They had me in tears they were so funny," the photojournalist recalls. "The other Jews were so quiet, but they were having this party on the bus. They embraced me and took me under their wing. They were having the time of their life, and they introduced me to the whole subculture."

Sidman-Moore says she knew immediately that she wanted to explore the lives of Cuban Jews, to tell in photographs the story of what makes them different from other Jews, and different from other Cubans.

Regarding this photo collection, she states, "Particularly rewarding for me in working on this project was the fact that it brought me back to my roots as a photojournalist. There were times when I would work on a commercial fashion shoot in the morning, and then shoot an Orthodox family in the afternoon. The differences between the two worlds were staggering. I hope this exhibit brings the Cuban Jewish world into better view. It is this community that shows the heart and substance of authentic contemporary life in South Florida."

## **A Brief History of South Florida's Cuban Jews**

Cuba has welcomed Jews for more than 100 years. American Jews helped support José Martí and the efforts for Cuban independence beginning in 1892, and some settled in Cuba seeking economic opportunities. Sephardim (Jews from the Iberian Peninsula) arrived in 1902 and started a congregation in 1906. By 1920, Ashkenazim (Eastern European Jews speaking Yiddish) fleeing pogroms began to settle in Cuba. After World War II, German-speaking refugees and Holocaust survivors found a safe haven in Cuba.

The Jews of Cuba founded institutions, educated their children in Jewish schools, supported Zionism, and contributed economically and culturally to their host communities. Some Jewish families migrated from Cuba to Florida beginning in the late 1920s, but most chose comfortable lives in Cuba until the new regime.

After the communist takeover of Cuba in 1959, Cuban Jews began arriving in Miami to seek political asylum. By the time of the takeover, a large percentage of Cuba's business community consisted of Jews, and therefore, they were amongst the first victims of the nationalized country.

Because it seemed unthinkable at the time that a communist regime could exist just 90 miles off the shore of the United States, Jews were taken by surprise and left swiftly, leaving behind their now nationalized money and properties. After the Bay of Pigs fiasco, they had no choice but to rebuild their lives from scratch. At the time, about 10,000 of the 12,000 Cuban Jews fled to South Florida, most settling in Miami-Dade County.

According to Dr. Ira Sheskin, Director of the Jewish Demography Project and professor at University of Miami, there are approximately 4,500 Cuban Jewish adults in the tri-county area, with 8,300 total persons in households containing at least one Cuban Jewish adult. Miami-Dade County alone hosts approximately 1,500 Cuban Jewish families.

Part of what makes the Cuban Jewish community unique is their multi-diasporic experience. Not only do they live outside of both Israel and Cuba, but they have ancestral ties to Poland, Russia, Turkey and Spain. Both the Sephardic (Jews from the Iberian Peninsula) and Ashkenazi (Eastern European Jews speaking Yiddish) backgrounds exist amongst them. Their ancestors have spoken Yiddish, Hebrew, Ladino (Judeo-Spanish), and the various European languages. Many are descendants from Spain's expulsion of 1492, whose ancestors converted but practiced their faith clandestinely and were referred to as *conversos* or *crypto Jews*. Many lost relatives in, or were survivors of, the Holocaust. In fact, within just two generations, many Jews fled Europe on the eve of, or during, World War II and began to settle into a new life in Cuba when quotas to the United States were cut, only to have to flee the communist regime shortly thereafter.

The term "Jewban" is an ethnic name originating here in South Florida, and is believed to have been coined by a Cuban Jew, Anthony Testino, in the past decade when he used it as the name for his synagogue's newsletter. It is considered a positive, self-identifying term used by those of Cuban Jewish heritage, although there was some speculation at one point that it might be misconstrued as an ethnic slur.

The intense diasporic experience of South Florida's Cuban Jews has given them a rare cultural identity which this exhibit hopes to capture.

## Educational Themes to Consider

This exhibit is a showcase for several educational themes:

|                        |                                  |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Citizenship            | IB (International Baccalaureate) |
| Immigration            | Tolerance                        |
| Latin-American History | Multiculturalism                 |
| World History          | Social Studies                   |
| Florida History        | Geography                        |
| U.S. History           | Visual Arts/Photography          |

Given South Florida's multicultural population, and the international makeup of its students in general, the following questions might be helpful to stimulate dialog with your students:

- *Are they Americans first? Or, the culture of their background first?*
- *How do they balance such a multitude of backgrounds and experiences?*
- *How do they prioritize?*
- *How do they blend, or not blend, with American life?*
- *For how many generations can one truly be of another culture?*
- *Is an American born in South Florida also of a foreign culture because the parent or grandparent is? Or, is he/she American?*
- *What if each parent/grandparent is from a different foreign culture?*
- *Which do they sense is their true "homeland?"*
- *What is the definition of "tradition" for them? American foods, music, etc? Foods and music of their foreign background? A combination? And is such a combination confusing or enriching?*
- *What is their "true" native tongue?*
- *Is the definition of "community" geographic, or cultural?*
- *When returning to their "roots," which roots do they return to? Why?*

## Some Outstanding Quotes

"My mother makes *guayabahumentaschen* for the holiday of Purim." – Ruth Behar, University of Michigan anthropologist and author of *An Island Called Home: Returning to Jewish Cuba*

"I love my lox with black beans and rice. I am a true Jewban." - Carmen Rodriguez, a Key West cabaret singer whose father is a Catholic Cuban and whose mother is a Jewish New Yorker

**Suggested Lesson Plan**  
**Grades K - 12**  
**A Multicultural Feast**

**Overview:**

Students in our multicultural society benefit tremendously by learning to become cooperative and interactive among diverse groups of people. They learn to recognize the importance of cultural diversity and the enrichment it fosters. They become open about the impact that cultural fusion has had on their values, traditions and lifestyles.

Teachers can discuss age-appropriate current and past events relative to human rights that gave rise to immigration and the resulting melting pot of the United States and South Florida in particular. Older students can address the impact of immigration not only on individuals, families and communities, but also its impact on politics, economy, law and the media. This topic is not only relevant and timely for children of all ages, but it is also interdisciplinary. It touches on several subjects: Geography, Social Studies, World History, U.S. History, Florida History, Psychology, Biology, Language Arts, Civics, Music, Art, Dance, Drama, Law, IB, Business and Foreign Language programs. Multicultural awareness is, for a student, a map through which the world becomes more intelligible.

**Objectives:**

- Students will identify cultural fusion in their lives and in their classroom.
- Students will recognize the impact of current and past events that gave rise to the influx of immigrants and the resulting multiculturalism.
- Students will display cooperation, tolerance and understanding while working on a multicultural project in a classroom setting.

**Pre-Visit Activity:**

- Introduce a unit on multiculturalism and immigration, stressing the idea that not one student in the class is 100% American, that whether it is in this generation or generations back, they are a melting pot of different cultures, ethnicities and backgrounds.
- Have each student list on an index card his/her multicultural background. They may need to take the card home overnight and ask their parents if they are not sure. Have them go as far back as possible.
- In class, let each student read aloud his/her background and then pin on a board all the index cards. You may get some backgrounds as recent and simple as Cuban/American, and you may get some as complex and historic as German/Russian/Cuban/American.
- Some students may want to share their familial history. For example: “My grandfather was German and my grandmother was Russian. They met during World War II and escaped, but could not get into America. So they went to Cuba instead. There, my Dad met a Hispanic woman and fell in love. They had three children including me, and came to the United States due to the Castro regime. We are now American citizens.”

## Post-Visit Activity

- Review the exhibit with the students, asking them to reflect on how Cuban Jews in South Florida blend their cultures while maintaining traditions. Depending on the age of the students, answers may vary from the simple to the complex.
- Have each student develop a holiday dinner menu based on his/her own mixed background. Use the title of this exhibit as an example: “**Lox with Black Beans and Rice.**”
- HINTS:
  - Have them select their favorite holiday. It might be Thanksgiving, Kwanzaa, or a Chinese holiday, for example, if the student is part Chinese.
  - Encourage them to create an eclectic menu. You will find that even younger students are fully familiar with all their ethnic foods, although you may need to help with spelling. For those from less traditional families, have them use the internet to research their ethnic foods.
  - Let students be creative!

### MENU SAMPLES:

Cuban/American Thanksgiving: Turkey, black beans and rice, stuffing, plantanos, guayaba pumpkin pie with ice cream, espresso

Greek/American Fourth of July: Barbeque of lamb skewers, hot dog skewers, burgers served in pita bread with yogurt sauce instead of mustard, Greek salad, French fries, potato chips served with hummos instead of onion dip, baklava with vanilla ice cream

Chinese/African American Chinese New Year: Spring rolls, fried chicken lo mein, collard greens, corn bread, Chinese fried noodles, green tea ice cream milk shakes

Italian/German/American Rosh Hashanah: Minestrone soup with mini matzoh balls instead of pasta, meatball platter, farfal or bowties with sautéed wiener sausage and onions, challah bruschetta, black forest cake, espresso

## Sunshine State Standards

Grades K-2:

LA.A.1.1, LA.A.2.1, LA.C.1.1, LA.C.2.1, SS.A.1.1, SS.A.5.1, SS.A.6.1, SS.B.2.1, SS.C.2.1, FL.B.1.1, FL.D.2.1, VA.A.1.1, VA.C.1.1, VA.E.1.1

Grades 3-5:

LA.A.1.2, LA.A.2.2, LA.C.1.2, LA.C.2.2, SS.A.1.2, SS.A.5.2, SS.A.6.2, SS.B.2.2, SS.C.2.2, FL.B.1.2, FL.D.2.2, VA.A.1.2, VA.C.1.2, VA.E.1.2

Grades 6-8:

LA.A.1.3, LA.B.2.3, LA.C.1.3, LA.C.2.3, SS.A.1.3, SS.A.4.3, SS.A.5.3, SS.A.6.3, SS.B.2.3, SS.C.2.3, SS.D.1.3, FL.D.2.3, VA.A.1.3, VA.C.1.3, VA.D.1.3, VA.E.1.3

Grades 9-12:

LA.A.1.4, LA.C.1.4, LA.C.2.4, SS.A.1.4, SS.A.4.4, SS.A.5.4, SS.B.2.4, SS.C.2.4, SS.D.1.4, SS.D.2.4, FL.B.1.4, VA.A.1.4, VA.C.1.4, VA.D.1.4, VA.E.1.4

## FCAT Connections

*Lox with Black Beans and Rice* provides many opportunities to fulfill the required elements of the **Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test**. Specifically, the following components apply directly to the exhibit and serve as a sampling of ways that required objectives and competencies may be achieved through the museum experience:

### **Language Arts:**

#### Component: Language/Word Study

- Uses personal experiences, discussion, visual stimuli, observations, reading, research and media to generate writing ideas ( LA.B.1.4.2, LA.B.2.4.1, LA.D.2.4.4)
- Expands the understanding of a variety of cultural vocabularies and dialects (LA.D.1.4.2)

#### Component: Listening/Speaking/Viewing

- Demonstrates appropriate listening skills in a variety of settings (LA.C.1.4.1)
- Listens attentively to recognize and summarize major points of emphasis by identifying facts, details, sequence and other literal content either orally or in writing (LA.C.1.3.3, LA.C.2.3.1, LA.C.3.3.1)

#### Component: Informational Reading

- Uses appropriate skills and resources to access, analyze and synthesize information (LA.A.1.4.4)

Component: Literature

- Examines how literature and art forms illustrate values and/or beliefs of a culture (LA.D.1.4.1)
- Identifies and analyzes the feelings, traits and motives of characters (LA.A.1.4.2, LA.D.2.4.2)
- Reads, views, listens to and discusses a variety of multicultural materials to gain new experiences and insights as well as a deeper understanding and appreciation of self and others (LA. A 2.3.3, LA.C.1.3.1, LA.E.2.3.6, LA.E.2.3.8)

**Social Sciences:**

Component: Historical Awareness

- Researches famous men and women, both past and present, who have contributed to Florida's development (SS.A.1.2.1, SS.A.6.2.1)
- Reads biographies, legends, stories detailing the lives and times of heroes and ordinary people throughout U.S. and Florida history (SS.A.1.3.1)
- Describes the importance of primary sources in the study of culture: e.g, artifacts, photographs and recordings (SS.A.1.2.2, SS.A. 5.2.7, SS.A. 6.2.3, SS.A.6.2.4)
- Describes the impact of people and ideas on the values, traditions and institutions in the pluralistic society of the U.S. using primary sources in art (SS.A.1.3.1, SS.A.4.3.3, SS.B.1.3.7)
- Describes the terms of discrimination, prejudice and stereotype and gives examples of each (SS.A.1.2.1, SS. A 5.2.7)
- Constructs a chart which shows the contributions made by various cultures within Florida (SS.A.1.2.2, SS.A.6.2.1)
- Develops an understanding of Miami-Dade's multicultural population by reading literature, stories, legends and examining art (SS.A.1.3.1, SS.A.5.3.2, SS.B.2.3.1, SS.C. 2.3.7)
- Discusses the changes that take place in communities whenever two or more cultures come into contact: e.g., the spread of ideas, values and behaviors (SS.A.1.3.1, SS.A. 3.3.1, SS.A. 6.3.3)

**Health Education:**

Component: Comprehensive Health/Responsible Health Behaviors

- Identifies aspects of cultures that may have an impact on one's own health and use of health services as well as understand the emotional and social health risks caused by prejudice in the community (HE.B.2.3.3, HE.B.2.3.4)

Component: Positive Emotional Development

- Recognizes how self-acceptance and self-improvement build positive self-esteem (HE.B.2.4.3)

## **Visual Arts:**

### **Component:** Personal Development

- Visits a local museum and analyzes its cultural, social and economic role. (VA.E.1.3.1)
- Develops communication skills through formal and informal critiques (VA.E.1.3.1)
- Values art as a vehicle for personal, professional and collective cultural expression (VA.C.1.3.1)

### **Component:** Aesthetic and Critical Inquiry

- Applies the critique process of description, analysis, interpretation and judgment both orally and in written form (VA.D.1.3.1)
- Investigates notable photographs, past and present (VA.C.1.3.1)
- Compares photographs cross-culturally (VA.C.1.3.1)
- Makes and justifies simple judgments about works of art (VA.D.1.1.1)

### **Component:** Cultural and Historical Context

- Describes how art is reflective of the political, technological, cultural and social climate (VA.C.1.3.1)

## **IB Programme (International Baccalaureate)**

### **Primary Years Programme:**

*Lox with Black Beans and Rice* addresses the six transdisciplinary themes of global significance that provide IB's framework for exploration and study:

- Who we are
- Where we are in place and time
- How we express ourselves
- How the world works
- How we organize ourselves
- Sharing the planet

The exhibit also incorporates IB's five essential elements—concepts, knowledge, skills, attitudes, action—so that students are given the opportunity to:

- gain knowledge that is relevant and of global significance
- develop an understanding of concepts, which allows them to make connections throughout their learning
- acquire transdisciplinary and disciplinary skills
- develop attitudes that will lead to international-mindedness
- take action as a consequence of their learning

### **Middle Years Programme:**

This exhibit addresses IB's three fundamental concepts that support and strengthen all areas of the curriculum:

- Intercultural Awareness
- Holistic Learning
- Communication

It also addresses the five transdisciplinary themes of global significance that provide IB's framework for exploration and study:

- Homo Faber (Human Ingenuity)
- ATL (Approaches to Learning)
- Environment
- Health and Social Education
- Community and Service

### **IB Diploma Programme**

This exhibit addresses IB's three core requirements that are included to broaden the educational experience and challenge students to apply their knowledge and understanding:

- The Extended Essay
- TOK (Theory of knowledge)
- CAS (Creativity, action, service)

It also ties in with three of the six academic areas surrounding the three core requirements:

- Individuals and Societies
- Language
- The Arts

## Suggested Bibliography

### Elementary School:

Robleda, Margarita. (2004). *Paco, Un Nino Latino en Estados Unidos / A Latin Boy in the United States*. Santillana USA Publishing.

Robleda, Margarita. (2005). *Maria, Una Nina Latina en Estados Unidos / A Latin Girl in the United States*. Santillana USA Publishing.

### Middle School:

Engle, Margarita. (2009). *Tropical Secrets: Holocaust Refugees in Cuba*. Henry Holt and Company

### High School:

Veciano-Suarez, Ana. (2004). *Flight to Freedom*. Scholastic.