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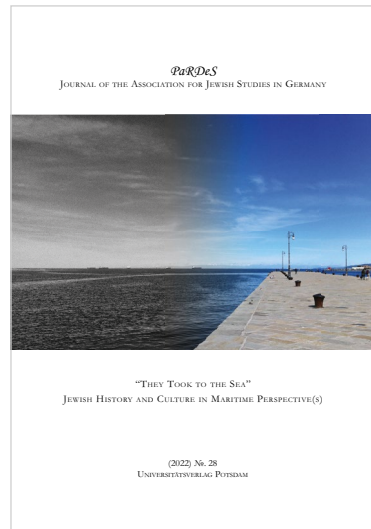
“They Took to the Sea”: Jewish History and Culture in Maritime Perspective(s)

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Jacob Brandon's Golden Anniversary Photo. © Courtesy of Grant Brandon

The Port Jew and Nuestra América: Narratives of Collective Responsibility and Belonging

by Dalia Wassner

Abstract

Jacob Brandon Maduro's *Memoirs and Related Observations* (Havana, 1953) speak to the lasting yet malleable legacy of Jewish Caribbean/Atlantic mercantile communities that defined early modern settlement in the Americas. A close reading of the *Memoirs*, alongside relevant archival records and community narratives, lends new perspectives to scholarship on Port Jewries and the Atlantic Diaspora. Specifically concerned with Jacob's adoption of such leading intellectual and political tropes as the Monroe doctrine, José Martí's *Nuestra America*, and a Zionism that evolved from an ideology to a reality, the *Memoirs* reveal a narrative at once defined by the tremendous upheavals of the first half of the 20th century, and an enduring sense of Jewish diasporic peoplehood defined through a Port Jew paradigm whereby the preservation of Jewish ethnicity is understood as synonymous with the championing of modernity.

1 Introduction: Port Jewries and the Americas

A contemporary generation of scholars has embarked on the important task of tracing early Sephardic settlements in the Americas, producing innovative frameworks for conceptualizing the trajectory of Jewish life across the region with an appropriate focus on the Caribbean.¹ Indeed, renewed scholarly at-

¹ For more on Jews of the Caribbean, cf. Jane S. Gerber, *The Jews in the Caribbean* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2014); Josette C. Goldish, *Once Jews: Stories of Caribbean Sephardim* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2009); Stanley Mirvis, *Sephardic Family Life in the Eighteenth-Century British West Indies* (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 2013). For more on the Atlantic Jewish diasporas, cf. Dale Rosengarten, "Port Jews and Plantation Jews: Carolina-Caribbean Connections" in *The Jews in the Caribbean*, ed. Jane S. Gerber (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2014), 289–310; Katalin Franciska Rac and Lenny A Ureña Valerio, *Jewish Experiences Across the Americas: Local Stories through*

tention has amplified current understandings of the economic ties and institutional relations that existed between Jews in various American colonial lands, as much pertaining to those powers that allowed and, at times, encouraged Jewish early modern settlement in the Americas as to the resulting expansive diaspora iterations pursued primarily through maritime mercantile avenues.² These new frameworks for understanding Caribbean Sephardic Atlantic Jewries in turn carry important implications for evolving notions of Jewish paths to modernity.

In what was a pathbreaking argument about Trieste Jewry published twenty years ago, Lois Dubin understood that a certain case study of Italian port Sephardim suggested a distinct path to modernity or cosmopolitanism, one that did not follow the Western European model of Haskalah as a necessity to accessing economic, political, or civic participation; this was an assessment Dubin then expanded to other locales, including Atlantic Jewries, thereby rendering a broader hermeneutic historical tool with which to help bridge the gap between Jewish history in North and South America and, in so doing, involving a critical role for Caribbean Port Jews. This school of scholarship has posited that Atlantic Jews served as veritable “harbingers of modernity,”³ thereby encouraging contemporary historians to more carefully consider the importance of an aqua-centric approach to history and to diaspora studies. In

Global Lenses (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2022); Richard L. Kagan and Philip D. Morgan, *Atlantic Diasporas: Jews, Conversos, and Crypto-Jews in the Age of Mercantilism, 1500–1800* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Federica Francesconi, Stanley Mirvis, Brian M. Smollett, and Jane S. Gerber, *From Catalonia to the Caribbean: The Sephardic Orbit from Medieval to Modern Times: Essays in Honor of Jane S. Gerber*, Brill Series in Jewish Studies Vol. 61 (Leiden: Brill, 2018); and Jonathan Irvine Israel, *Diasporas Within a Diaspora: Jews, Crypto-Jews and the World Maritime Empires (1540–1740)*, Brill Series in Jewish Studies Vol. 30 (Leiden [etc.]: Brill, 2002).

² For more on Port Jews, cf. Lois Dubin, “Introduction: Port Jews in the Atlantic World ‘Jewish History,’” *Jewish History* 20, no. 2 (2006): 117–127; Lois C. Dubin, “Wings on Their Feet ... and Wings on Their Head’: Reflections on the Study of Port Jews,” *Jewish Culture and History* 7, no. 1 (2004): 14–30; Chris S. Monaco, “Port Jews or a People of the Diaspora? A Critique of the Port Jew Concept,” *Jewish Social Studies* 15, no. 2 (2009), 137–166; David Sorkin, “The Port Jew: Notes Toward a Social Type” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 50, no. 1 (1999): 87–97; Lois C. Dubin, *The Port Jews of Habsburg Trieste: Absolutist Politics and Enlightenment Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); David Cesarani and Gemma Romain, eds., *Jews and Port Cities, 1590–1990: Commerce, Community, and Cosmopolitanism* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2006). See also the special issue of *Jewish History* (20, 2006) and Jonathan D. Sarna’s introduction, “Port Jews in the Atlantic: Further Thoughts” *Jewish History* 20 (2006): 213–219.

³ Dubin, “Introduction: Port Jews in the Atlantic World ‘Jewish History,’” 124.

this vein, Adam Sutcliffe argues for the centrality of Atlantic Jewry in lending complexity and accuracy to current understandings of Jewish History:

[I]ntegrating an Atlantic perspective into Jewish history extends beyond the de-centering of the nation-state paradigms [and builds on Jonathan Israel's attention] on Sephardim as the international "cross-cultural brokers" par excellence from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth century, possessing a cultural malleability and a geographical reach unmatched by any other trading diaspora in the period. [...] In an Atlantic context, in which ethnic definitions of Jewishness were generally more important than religious or communal ones, and in which personal identities were often highly fluid and indeterminate, the very organizational category of 'Jewish history' is itself stretched and problematized.⁴

Monaco too understands this conceptualization as offering "a welcome counterpoint to what Sorkin referred to as the 'Ashkenazification' of modern Jewish history." Furthermore, Monaco suggests a stronger emphasis on shared worldviews whereby ethnicity, "not as an object or as entity but rather as a way of looking at the world – [implicates] a cognitive rather than objectivist orientation."⁵ A reimagined centering of identity on ethnicity as applied to maritime diaspora trading alliances of Atlantic Jewries through the late 1800s carries important implications for the modern period. These academic dialogues have lent new paradigms for understanding Sephardic Jewish families who built networks of business and community, accompanying the expansion of empires and the subsequent emergence of American republics and nation-states. Consequential scholarship on Port Jewry in fact led to Dubin's evolved academic goal to focus on the complex relations between commerce, culture, and cosmopolitanism among and across diverse port Jewries.⁶

When considering diverse historical hermeneutic paradigms of Sephardic diaspora studies alongside dynamic new scholarship on Port Jewries, Jacob Brandon's *Memoirs* lend provocative insights into the dialectic nature of evolving Jewish life and collective narratives in the Americas during the first half of the 20th century, spanning from the establishment of the modern state

⁴ Adam Sutcliffe, "Jewish History in the Age of Mercantilism," in *Atlantic Diasporas: Jews, Conversos, and Crypto-Jews in the Age of Mercantilism, 1500–1800*, ed. Richard L. Kagan and Philip D. Morgan (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 18–32, here 19.

⁵ Monaco, "Port Jews or a People of the Diaspora?" 142.

⁶ Dubin, "Wings on Their Feet ... and Wings on Their Head," 15.

of Panama to the establishment of the modern state of Israel. The present article suggests that a cultural and intellectual approach to modern American Atlantic Jewish sources lends important implications for Port Jewry scholarship and maritime scholarship in the 20th century, thereby further challenging the boundaries of social science disciplines and encouraging continued scholarly debate about the substance and parameters of American Jewry.

2 **Jacob Brandon Maduro: An Entrepreneur of the Vintage Cloth**

Jacob (Jack) Brandon Maduro's *Memoirs* provide a lens into the enduring legacy of the Port Jew among Atlantic Sephardi mercantile families, through the personal narratives of an eloquent member of one such foundational family, revealing a contemporary advocacy for bridging Jewish communities of South and North America while evidencing a persisting, if altered, Jewish presence in the 20th century Caribbean. The *Memoirs* and supporting archival sources indicate that Jacob Brandon Maduro was proud of his mercantile and familial heritage, and that it was precisely his Jewish ethnicity that fueled an activist responsibility to an evolving American Jewish diaspora reimagined between the 1920s to 1950s.⁷

The *Memoirs* provide a firsthand account of Jacob Brandon Maduro's business ventures, his Jewish communal and state commitments, and his cultural interests; however, the source is perhaps most compelling in rendering a narrative effected through fused enunciations of classic American tropes, including such contradictory ones as the quintessentially Monroe Doctrine and Martí's *Nuestra America*, employed in concert to espouse the responsibility of interwar and post-WWII US Jewry to support Caribbean and Latin American Jewry. The intellectual and cultural tropes engaged by Jacob Brandon Maduro demonstrate a didactic attempt to reconcile conflicting contemporary politics of the Americas in service of a persistent familial Jewish role envisioned as a bridge between communities, economies, and governments at the onset of WWI, during the unfolding tragedies of WWII, in light of the establishment

⁷ We learn that the Brandon Maduro Family moved in mercantile familial circles within the U.S. (NY, PA, Chicago), Cuba, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Hamburg, London, Paris, and Australia in the 1910s, before the outbreak of WWI (cf. Brandon, *Memoirs*, 77–82). For concurrent primary documents, cf. Cuba, 1943–1997, B'nai B'rith International Archives, MS-900, Box D2-1, Folder 12. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

of the State of Israel, and responsive to the rise and fall of Fulgencio Batista in Cuba. Throughout, Jacob does not waiver in espousing a worldview in which his Jewish ethnicity serves to navigate any number of current cultural and political milieus, negotiations Jacob makes while strengthening very Jewish Atlantic maritime and diasporic identities and internal connections of which he was a product. The overarching narrative and arguments of the *Memoirs* thereby confer to justify the author's dedicated stewardship of a collective contemporary Jewry in the Americas, which is at every point equated with the broader betterment of society and in defense of a cosmopolitan western civilization in a world increasingly divided between the allies of democracy and its foes.

3 Weaving a Life and a Narrative

Jacob Brandon Maduro was born in the Republic of Panama on August 4, 1880, and was educated at Dr. Fach's Collegiate Institute of New York. After graduation, he worked with his uncle Isaac at the U.S. office of the Brandon Brothers Banking Firm. The Memoir chronicles Jacob's family business in Panama, including the extraordinary respect his father David claimed among Jews and non-Jews alike due to his noteworthy and plentiful contributions to the institutional foundations of the young country. For example, the *Memoirs* describe David Brandon's involvement in tending to the wounded and dead during the Belisario Porras Revolution; we learn of David's business as a banker in Panama and his family's role in financing the U.S. completion of the canal, an involvement not detached from David's support of the independence coup and his friendship toward Dr. Manuel Amador Guerrero, the first President of Panama. In fact, it is in the pages addressing David's funeral, which several corroborating sources cite as the first and only time that the Cathedral bells rang for a non-Catholic in the country, that mark the second mention of Jacob's family's Jewish heritage thus far in the *Memoirs*, here summoned to remark that Jews and non-Jews, people of all colors and races, mourned his father's passing, after which Dr. Amador himself promised to look after David's widow.⁸ The Memoir later traces Jacob's marriage to Esther Steinberger of Bradford, Pennsylvania, as well as their return to Panama and

⁸ Brandon, *Memoirs*, 57; Stanley Fidanque Brandon, *Amor, Trabajo y Altruismo* (Panama: Pan American Printing Company, 2016).

Jacob's responsibility to the family business after his marriage. Throughout, Jacob's parents' connections to high-ranking government officials present prominently.⁹ The move back to Panama as a married man was followed by another stint in New York and then New Rochelle, before Jacob and Esther moved in 1922 yet again, in a move proving to be the one of greatest longevity in bringing the family for 30 consecutive years to Havana, Cuba.

Throughout the *Memoirs*, the reader is privy to reflections on theology, organized religion, and the changing world order as it unfolded throughout the 20th century, inclusive of its paradigm-shifting revolutions, destructions, and rebirths.¹⁰ For example, in his single years in New York, Jacob recounts a higher affinity for attending Ethical Culture lectures by Dr. Felix Adler on Sundays at Carnegie Hall, rather than attending Saturday morning prayer at the Sephardi synagogue at Shearith Israel at 19th St. & Broadway or subsequently at Central Park and West 68th St. with his uncle Isaac, who was a dedicated congregant of the community led by the esteemed Sephardic rabbi, Reverend Harry Pareira Mendes. In this context, Jacob reflects on his father's own wariness toward "dogmatic religion" and how this inclination probably influenced his son's contemplating attending Dr. Stephen Wise's synagogue in New York but ultimately preferring Sundays at Carnegie Hall. Drawn to the vibrant intellectual community assembled by the school of Ethical Culture and its leaders, including Dr. Felix Adler, Dr. Elliot, and Dr. Franz Boas, Jacob resonated with these secular models of spiritual and moral development, and found himself in good company of a certain brand of Jewish New York intellectuals, most notably of German provenance.¹¹ Nevertheless, the family

⁹ The *Memoirs* also reveal that Jacob and Esther entertained William Taft, then Secretary of State to Theodore Roosevelt, among others who visited the Canal Zone, and were guests of President Amador alongside the Bishop of Panama (cf. Brandon, *Memoirs*, 64–65). Also included is a letter from January 15, 1928, where Jacob Brandon and his eldest son Earl receive Calvin Coolidge, President of the United States in Havana Cuba (cf. Brandon, *Memoirs*, 105).

¹⁰ Jacob Brandon Miscellaneous Writings include *Verses* (Havana: Editorial Selecta, 1945); *Verses Vol. III. I* (Havana: Editorial Selecta, 1946); *Miscellaneous Writings Vol IV.* (Havana: Editorial Selecta, 1946); *Peace River (A Message in Metaphor) How Precious is Freedom?* (Habana: Imp. Fernandez y CIA, S. en C., 1952); *Select Miscellaneous Writings* (Havana: Imp. Fernandez y CIA, S. en C., 1952); *Materialism Vs. True Substance* (Havana: Imp. Fernandez y CIA, S. en C., 1954); *Once More we Ask of him Who Passeth, "Wither Goest Thou"?*; *Eloquence; An Invisible Power.* (Havana: Cuba Intellectual, 1957).

¹¹ Brandon, *Memoirs*, 10. Jacob writes about not being very observant in religious rituals but recalls that Friday night services were held at Uncle Isaac's home in New York City and the family attended Saturday services at Shearith Israel at 19th St. & Broadway and then at Cen-

homesteads that formed the center of the shared ethnicity that so defined Port Jews comprised the same markers still evident in the Panamanian family identity before and after the turn of the century, a characteristic that endured in their New York setting. Friday night dinners in Panama between 1892 and 1897 are reported as counting on all members of the Brandon Maduro family gathering without fail at Grandma Maduro's house. Yet it is in the Havana years that Jacob's sense of responsibility grows for the Jewish community in America enunciated as a pan-American entity, evidenced most notably through Jacob's advocacy and leadership in bringing B'nai Brith and Hillel to Cuba and reflected in his stated (if, at first, tempered) pride over the creation of the modern state of Israel.

Most strikingly, the arguments that Jacob employs in narrating his support of Jewish education and cultural organizations on the island are offered in explicit service of a meaningful sense of Jewish identity and peoplehood to be shared among all Jews in Latin America as part of the Americas writ large, an argument effected through an unabashed mixture of narratives borrowed from Monroe and Martí. The resulting narrative in fact pulls from two disparate and contradictory visions of "America" that are themselves results of different historical periods (1823 and 1891, respectively), yet employed in Jacob's narration of the mid-twentieth century, they read as an amalgam crafted to advocate as much for the Jews' validity in post-independence Cuba as for a post-World War II transnational Jewish network of communities in the Americas. The narrative's unifying thread is a call for a broadly conceived Jewish diasporic ethnicity pursued most urgently in response to World War II, its refugee crisis, the atrocities committed by Hitler and his allies,¹² the

tral Park and West 68th St., where the esteemed rabbi Reverend Harry Pareira Mendes officiated. For more on Franz Boas's reception by contemporary US academics, cf. Morris E. Opler, "Franz Boas: Religion and Theory," *American Anthropologist*. New Series 69, no. 6 (Dec. 1967), 741–745; and George Makari, *Of Fear and Strangers: A History of Xenophobia* (New Haven, CT/London: Yale University Press, 2021).

¹² Jacob's vehemently scathing description of Hitler's rise to power (and that of his willing collaborators, including Goebbels and Himmler) is presented in a chapter titled "Hitler, Mephistopheles Incarnate" (Brandon, *Memoirs*, 139–140). Jacob also informs the reader that there were German sympathizers among Cubans and Spaniards in Cuba, and notes that part of his assumed leadership role in the country involved curbing their influence in Cuba, an activity Jacob pursued also through active participation in the local press, i.e. the *Diario la Marina* (cf. Brandon, *Memoirs*, 147). For more on the fascist experience in Cuba, cf. Katia Figueredo Cabrera, *Cuba y la Guerra Civil española: mitos y realidades de la derecha hispano-cubana* (1936–1942) (Havana: Universidad de La Habana, 2014).

emergence of Cold War politics, and also the threat of acculturation among Latin American and Caribbean Jewries. In this context, the birth of the modern State of Israel serves mostly as an additional source of pride to be shared among the Jews of the Americas as an integral part of world Jewry.

4 American Jews, also in Cuba

If in Cuba Jacob at first resisted joining the United Hebrew Congregation over concerns that the general meetings would not be as efficient or well-cultured as the ones he was accustomed to in New Rochelle, he soon acceded as “it was not in Jack’s nature to reside permanently in a community without trying to make some personal contribution to its progress.”¹³ At the same time, Jacob’s employed language and imagery reveal assurances to the reader of Cuba’s desirability as a destination for Jewish settlement, due as much to the hospitable nature of the land as to that of its people. Here Jacob lauds the lack of anti-Semitism on the Island, which he attributes in large part to the Hispanic affinity shared between the Sephardim and the Cubans.¹⁴ Cuba is portrayed as a natural home to [Sephardic] Jews like himself, but the designation could be extended to any Jews who were willing to learn the language and show respect for local customs, proving to be grateful guests. The extent to which the argument *is not* concerned with symbiosis or authenticity equals the extent to which it *is* concerned with peaceful cohabitation. It is a perspective more applicable to Port Jewries than to acculturation arguments prevalent among Western Jewries who modernized through processes of Haskalah.

Illustratively, Jacob reflects on a country where for thirty years he bred his family with some “social and cultural distinction,” noting his appreciation as a Jew for his new home, a sentiment on which he expounded by hailing the hospitable nature of the habitat and its people.¹⁵ The praise is resonant of the admirable Cuban independence fighter José Martí. Jacob himself reflects (in English) on the difficulty of finding a translation that can do justice to such a hero’s words and wisdom, one that would aptly convey the revolutionary’s efforts that led Cubans (and all Americans) to claim their own authentic

¹³ Brandon, *Memoirs*, 114.

¹⁴ Brandon, *Memoirs*, 115.

¹⁵ Brandon, *Memoirs*, 119.

identity based on a shared unique history and land. Martí's influence is evident in Jacob's own renditions on Cuba:

Although Mankind is one genus in the order of Nature, there exists in all native and inherited cultures an ethnic individualism which contributes in its own imagery, style and rhythm to the Symphony of the Universe. We find the same quality of uniqueness in each snow-flake, in the petals of each flower, in the lines of every human hand, in the unrepeatable drapery of each sunset; indeed, in every object that meets the human eye. By this means Universal Intelligence manifests its infinite versatility, and pours Its glory into receptive minds among the Children of Men.¹⁶

When one compares the language of Martí's "Nuestra America," the resonance of the cadence and sentiment are clear:

[O]ne who knows what elements his own country is made up of, and how best to marshal them so as to achieve, by means and institutions arising from the country itself, that desirable state in which every man knows himself and exercises his talents, and all enjoy the abundance that Nature, for the good of all, has bestowed on the land they make fruitful by their labor and defend with their lives. The government must arise from the country. The government's spirit must be the spirit of the country. The government's form must be in harmony with the country's natural constitution. The government is no more than the equilibrium among the country's natural elements.¹⁷

Yet Martí famously extolls the validity of that which is born of American soil over that born in Europe, extending the warning to the neo-colonial threat that then loomed, namely in the control and influence embodied by their closest neighbor, the United States:

No Yankee or European book could furnish the key to the Hispano-American enigma [...] From the Río Bravo to the Straits of Magellan, the Great Cemi, riding high astride a condor, has scattered the seeds of the new América across the romantic nations of the continent and the suffering islands of the sea!¹⁸

¹⁶ Brandon, *Memoirs*, 123.

¹⁷ José Martí, "Nuestra América," in *The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, ed. Aviva Chomsky, Barry Carr, Alfredo Prieto, and Pamela Maria Smorkaloff (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 119–124, here 120.

¹⁸ Jose Marti, "Nuestra América," 122.

This element of Martí is entirely ignored in Jacob's writings. From a Cuban perspective, the abuses of colonialism and urgent warnings about neo-colonialism are as prevalent in Martí's message as they are in his enduring legacy; from a Port Jew mentality and an enduring Atlantic Jewish mindset concerned not with inter-American powerplays but rather focused on the importance of maintaining a connected world based on shared access to goods, services, and communities, the primordial conversation is the one uniting communities divided only by circumstance and distance.

5 Translating Cuban Idealism to Jewish Pragmatism

Jacob's stated pride in the Cuban people and their heritage, enunciated through his reverence of Martí as the imperishable Cuban statesman and visionary, is reiterated by the Jewish communal leader when assuming responsibility for his Jewish European brethren during WWII. Working alongside the US-run Joint Distribution Committee and the Cuban government, Jacob labored tirelessly for three years to help Jewish refugees sailing from Germany while urging US Jews' assistance as the refugees' stay in Cuba became prolonged.¹⁹ For his work, Jacob was awarded a distinction of "Caballero (Knight of the Order)" in 1940 by Cuban President Federico Laredo Bru, who was succeeded by Fulgencio Batista in May of that same year.²⁰ For this same work in aiding the Jewish refugees of the Second World War, Jacob was approached to head the application for a B'nai Brith Chapter in Havana. While at first Jacob was hesitant to undertake the task due to his stated disillusionment with Jewish organizations on the island, he reportedly acceded upon understanding it was to be an international endeavor, one that would be affiliated with the Anti-Defamation League and would thus provide a link with American Jewry "and the rest of the civilized world [... with ...] the fight against racial injustice [being] powerfully backed in Washington."²¹ In considering his own

¹⁹ Brandon, *Memoirs*, 152. For more on the JDC work in Cuba, cf. archives: "Cuba: Jewish Refugee Assistance," JDC Archives, accessed August 10, 2022, <https://archives.jdc.org/project/cuba-jewish-refugee-assist/>; and Zhava Litvac Glaser, "Laura Margolis and JDC Efforts in Cuba and Shanghai: Sustaining Refugees in a Time of Catastrophe", in *The JDC at 100: A Century of Humanitarianism*, ed. Avinoam Patt, Atina Grossmann, Linda G. Levi and Maud S. Mandel (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2019), 167–204.

²⁰ Brandon, *Memoirs*, 153.

²¹ Brandon, *Memoirs*, 158.

involvement with B'nai Brith, Jacob reflects his successful efforts at securing a meeting with Mr. Henry Monsky at the Waldorf Astoria in New York City early in the year 1946, along with Dr. Abraham Leon Sachar, the latter of whom directed the Hillel Foundation at the time.²² In no uncertain terms, Jacob advocated for the duty of Hillel to reach Jewish co-religionists in the entire region, with Brandon reportedly positing to Monsky, "What has B'nai Brith done for these co-religionists in other parts of America, and particularly for the rising generation which is absorbing all the idiosyncrasies of Latin civilization?"²³ Jacob thereafter agreed to head the petition for a Havana Chapter of B'nai Brith and was subsequently nominated to act as the first President of the Charter, named the Maimonides Lodge.²⁴

Jacob's tireless advocacy is equally represented in his *Memoirs* and corroborating communal and archival sources as fueled by an overt responsibility to transnational Jewish institutions whose activities and leadership he assessed as critical to preserving an American diasporic Jewish identity decidedly described in ethnic, cultural, and community orientation, rather than along religious terms. Speculating that there must be about one million Jews "south of the Rio Grande and all the way down to Patagonia," Jacob adamantly pursued his mission in Cuba and for a time succeeded in expanding the activities of B'nai Brith there, housed at the United Hebrew Congregation, another Cuban institution where Jacob served as President. As borne out in the *Memoirs* and corroborating B'nai Brith documentation held at the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati,²⁵ Jacob Brandon was determined to ensure that his fellow American brethren's identities would not become secondary to their Cuban, Argentine, or any other Caribbean or Latin American ones. It also bares mentioning that Jacob's meetings in New York were conducted

²² Cf. Brandon, *Memoirs*, 160. Dr. Shachar later became the first President of Brandeis University (1948–1968). Brandeis University was founded by the US Jewish community as an institute for higher education where Jews would be welcome when they faced quotas elsewhere. For more cf. Stephen J. Whitfield, Waltham (MA), "Brandeis University", in *Encyclopedia of Jewish History and Culture Online*, accessed 14 August 2022, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2468-8894_ejhc_COM_0115. Original German Language Edition: Enzyklopädie Jüdischer Geschichte und Kultur. Im Auftrag der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig herausgegeben von Dan Diner. © J.B. Metzler, Stuttgart/Springer-Verlag GmbH Deutschland 2011–2017.

²³ Brandon, *Memoirs*, 161.

²⁴ Cf. Brandon, *Memoirs*, 158.

²⁵ Cuba, 1943–1997, B'nai B'rith International Archives, MS-900, Box D2-1, Folder 12. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

as a countermeasure to the activities of the Zionist Committee of the Centro Israelita. If Jacob's efforts were geared toward strengthening the Jews of the Americas, the establishment of the state of Israel presented as a fundraising adversary. The *Memoirs* thereby also echo contentious stances debated in the US most famously between Chaim Weizmann, Albert Einstein, Louis Brandeis, and Felix Frankfurter, as the needs of the nascent state and that of the diaspora were passionately weighed and argued.²⁶ Yet, by 1953, Jacob reflects on the admirability of the young state and even dedicates a chapter of his *Memoirs* on Israel's fifth anniversary to proudly note the steadfast prominence of Israel in his own thoughts, even lending a comparison of Israel and the U.S. as honorable partners to peace with their neighbors and, as such, serving as comparable partners to enhance global Jewish peoplehood:

At this point Jews the world over need no longer suffer the pangs of religious self-consciousness and social frustration [...]. This new, virile community, heir in great part to two thousand years of dispersion, suffering, and tragedy, reminds us of the extraordinary fact that the Jews as an ethnic group have never surrendered or outlived their sense of responsibility.²⁷

Emphasizing the ethnic nature of said Jewish peoplehood, Jacob compares the modern secular greatness of the State of Israel to that of biblical times, noting that ancient Israel also did not survive due to a "blind, ill-founded faith in what had become a venal, intolerant and decadent theocracy."²⁸ Steadfast in favoring a shared ethnicity and history over a religious practice or belief, Jacob repeatedly accepts responsibility to ensure the endurance of a meaningful and united pan-American Jewry, which with the emergence of modern-day Israel evolves to manifest as a symbiotic partner to a civilized modernity reflected as much in Israel and in its Jewish Diaspora counterparts in the Americas.

Jacob's continued efforts in the 1940s in bringing B'nai Brith and Hillel to Latin America are reflected in his *Memoirs* inclusive of an October 1949 invitation issued by Mayor Harold Turk of Miami Beach, Florida, and delivered

²⁶ Cf. Walter Isaacson, "How Einstein Divided America's Jews" *The Atlantic*, December 2009, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2009/12/how-einstein-divided-americas-jews/307763/>; Joel Z. Wagman, *Brandeis, Weizmann and Einstein: Four Days in Cleveland, June 1921*, (s.l. Xlibris, 2020).

²⁷ Brandon, *Memoirs*, 171–173.

²⁸ Brandon, *Memoirs*, 173.

personally by Mr. Gilbert Balkin, president of the Anti-Defamation League of New York: Jacob was to be the principle speaker at a November 8, 1949 meeting held at the prestigious Delano Hotel to “promote interest in Inter-American Understanding” and to be held under the auspices of the Miami Beach Lodge of B’nai Brith.²⁹ Jacob reports extensively on this honor and in the *Memoirs* includes documentation of the favorable reporting of his speech in various Miami press outlets, alongside his award of the “Freedom of the City” key granted in concert with Dr. Manuel Velazquez, Consul-General of Cuba at Miami, who subsequently filed Jacob’s speech at the Ministerio de Estado in Havana along with a report on the Meeting.³⁰ In this very speech, it is worth noting that Jacob emphatically lauds Martí, Monroe, and B’nai Brith as examples to be followed, presented as complementary philosophical and political prescriptions and entities aligned in strengthening inter-American alliances, as necessary at the time of Cuba’s independence as a half a century later, when the free countries of the West faced a call to band against the despotism of the East. Adopting the language of the Monroe Doctrine alongside the revolutionary anticolonial sentiment of Martí and the contemporary trans-American goals of B’nai Brith, Jacob ignores the historical specificities of each as well as their contradicting connotations and effects when strung together and instead employs them equally through the purview of the Port Jew and his desire for brotherhood across the Atlantic and throughout the Americas. It is in this context that in the November 1949 meeting in Miami Beach, Jacob advocated for the importance of pan-American allegiances in order to further his mission of fomenting prosperous and enriching Jewish existence throughout a connected and hospitable America on a hemispheric plane:

I have been a resident of Cuba for more than 25 years. I am happy to be able to say that I have never been made to feel alien to the kindly and hospitable community in which I live. Quite to the contrary, as I have become more proficient in its rich and expressive language and have familiarized myself with its social philosophy well tinted as it is with Hispanic tradition, I have arrived at the conclusion that despite outward divergencies there is a definite trend in the Americas toward cultural unification.³¹

²⁹ Brandon, *Memoirs*, 164a.

³⁰ Brandon, *Memoirs*, 164aa.

³¹ Brandon, *Memoirs*, 164c.

In the same vein, Jacob Brandon Maduro promotes B'nai Brith's extension to Cuba by extolling the recent designation of the island country as the site of UNESCO's Latin America branch, chosen due to its "strategic importance, but also [out] of appreciation on the part of the statesmen throughout the world that the people of Cuba provide a wholesome psychological balance in the scale of Inter-American solidarity."³²

The *Memoirs* thus reflect Jacob's furthering of non-Jewish transatlantic partnerships, including UNESCO along the Finlay Institute of the Americas, for example, as consistent with Jewish partnerships throughout the Americas that serve the shared cause of increased defense for human rights and widespread peace. It is a focus born of a cosmopolitan rather than empirical or nationalistic perspectives, one that proved critical to Port Jewries and the emergent Atlantic Diasporas of the 20th century. In this light, the following statement reflects a historical narrative that is entirely consistent with a Jewish identity defined through transnational ethnic lines:

We proudly behold the increasing stature of B'nai Brith in our own day as a competently trained field-unit wherever danger threatens the social stability of any community in the Americas. With these facts before us, we cherish the hope that this Convention in a foreign, hospitable land will serve as a precedent for other conventions overseas; that it may prove to be the first span in a series of spiritual bridges across the waters which physically separate the peoples of the Americas; that one day not too far away, we shall visualize the completion of the remaining spans of this structure not made with hands, and dedicate it as a memorial to the ageless longing for brotherhood in every human heart, reinforced by equality of opportunity for each and every loyal citizen whatever his race, color or religious creed may be.³³

Jacob ends his address on November 8, 1949 eager to promote B'nai Brith as an arm of Jewish pride and solidarity that existentially aligned with the important work of UNESCO through an external measure that likewise identified in Cuba a ready partner for a larger regional network for the benefit of all humankind.³⁴

³² Brandon, *Memoirs*, 164c.

³³ Brandon, *Memoirs*, 164c.

³⁴ Cf. Brandon, *Memoirs*, 157.

6 Conclusions

In Jacob Brandon's *Memoirs*, the Havana years most strikingly reflect his sense of responsibility for the Jewish community in America writ large. Extolling an amalgamated narrative of Martí and Monroe, and aided by the contemporary missions of B'nai Brith, the Anti-defamation league, and UNESCO, the conglomerate narrative presented in 1953 reads consistent with the perspective of a modern Atlantic Port Jewry, a context where leaders of families became community leaders who advocated as much for local belonging, mercantile entrepreneurial opportunities, and an ethnically defined and culturally engaged Jewish transnational fraternity across the Americas. Evidenced in the *Memoirs* is a narrative that does not overtly doubt the writer's coterminous right to economic entrepreneurship, civic involvement, cultural participation, or Jewish communal organization, and the resultant claims of belonging and acceptance reveal an ensuing responsibility to the communities themselves to maintain their cohesion as part and parcel of pan-American alliances for democracy and against bigotry. Jacob Brandon Maduro as a Sephardic Atlantic Jew embodied the very bridge between the various worlds he traversed.³⁵

³⁵ The author wishes to thank Siena Wigert, her research assistant at the Brandeis Initiative on the Jews of the Americas, for her insight and dedication to the project.