

Modesto Maidique  
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Samuel (S): ...just saying that part of this collection, sorry, is that if you're comfortable with it, I'm going to donate this along with the other oral histories that I've collected so far to UNC's library, just the transcript of it. And I'll send you a copy of that as well. Yeah. That's really it.

Modesto (M): So what is this about? "Interview should be closed to researchers until..."

S: Somebody like Harry Skilton wanted to hold off on the transcript being submitted to other people so if that's something that you want that's fine. Awesome. Thank you so much.

M: How is Harry doing? I haven't seen him in 20 years or something.

S: He's good. He lives outside of Jacksonville.

M: What does he do?

S: I think he's retired and he writes for a magazine that's based out of Coral Gables.

M: There are two brothers.

S: There are three brothers I think. Richard, Harry and Bill. And Bill is a Methodist minister... Episcopalian minister.

M: Bill was the guy that was my classmate.

S: Okay.

M: I was a couple of years older.

S: So you were '57. High school class?

M: '58. I was '58.

S: Okay so you were a year younger than Chris Baker and those guys.

M: Yes. No, a year older.

S: Were you in the high school or bachillerato program?

M: In the high school.

S: Okay so tell me a little bit about your family background if that's okay. First of all, I'm excited to talk to you because of what you've done since. Everyone says that you're a person that needs to be a part of this project just because your understanding of your placement of the American community I think is...

M: If I had a Columns this year, which is what we used to call our yearbook you would find, and I know it was unanimous from the guy who put together the yearbook, I was the voted the most likely to succeed by my high school classmates.

S: Yeah. How big was your high school class?

M: 17. Very small class but we all went to college.

S: It's been an impressive... James Wynn I talked to who helped invent Lasik surgery I guess.

M: What year was he? Do you know?

S: '59 I think but he was one of those short-term folks who came for a year and a half so he probably came halfway through your senior year. What did your parents do in Cuba?

M: Okay so you want a brief family history?

S: If that's okay.

M: Sure. My father was a teacher and he went to a Normal School and after he taught for a while he was elected to the city council of his city called Ciego de Ávila. After he was elected to City Council he got a little bit more ambitious and he was elected to Congress, I believe in 1924. Then he became very prominent in his state and he wanted to go a little higher so he was elected to the Senate. So he became one of 24 senators in the country. And you'll find a number of people, including for instance a classmate of mine, Jorge Tarafa, who was also the son of a senator. And if you go here in Miami, you'll find that the sons of senators are very well represented amongst the leaders. There were only 300 senators in the whole history of Cuba and I don't have this number but my guesstimate is when the revolution broke there were probably only 100 living ones. I think the last one died two or three years ago so the entire Cuban senate has passed. My father was from Camaguey province, which is now broken down into several smaller provinces. Ciego de Ávila was one of the provinces and it was named after its major city, Ciego de Ávila. At one point, one of my uncles was the publisher of the local newspaper. Another uncle was the mayor and my father who was the senator. And my grandfather's farm had been subdivided and it comprised about 1/3 of the city. So we were doing well.

S: What did your grandfather... the crop was sugar?

M: No. Just I think... the answer is I don't know but he had farms and one of the farms he had subdivided into real estate and made it into part of the town of Ciego de Ávila. But when you go to the place- we probably were involved in sugar but I'm not sure, where the sugar was- where they unloaded the sugar, no loaded it for transport to a sugar mill, the place is called Maidique and the sign is still there. They changed everything but the sign is still there. So lets see, on my mother's side...

S: Just real quick, what year was your father elected to the Senate? Do you know?

M: I think it was 19... lets see. My father was born in 1889. I believe he was a congressman in 1920 which would make him 31. And then in 1924 he would've been 35. Yeah. He was the youngest senator.

S: So he was elected in '24 or '34?

M: '24 yeah. That's an 8 year term.

S: What was his name?

M: Same as mine. Exactly.

S: Okay.

M: And my mother comes from a family of professionals. We're talking about and I can show you a picture, which I happen to have on my cell phone. But if I go from oldest to youngest: doctor, lawyer, pharmacist, teacher, teacher, police lieutenant-poor guy, lawyer, lawyer and phys ed. professor.

S: Wow.

M: And that's in the early 1900s. That's very unusual. There were nine kids and nine college degrees. Most of them professional degrees and the reason it's nine and nine is one of them had two and one of them had zero.

S: What did her father do?

M: He was the son of the owner of a huge tobacco plantation. But there was a fire in the, I don't know, early 1900s that had wiped them out completely. So my grandfather went from landowner to aristocrat landowner to bookkeeper. And my mother was born in Pinar del Rio which is a family secret that I'm divulging. But at age two she came to Havana. She wanted nothing to do with this little town. She was a Havana girl. Which she was, she said to me, "I don't even have memories of the place. How the hell can you say I'm from there? I'm from Havana." And my father, there's a song in Cuba, *Amor de mi Bohio*, and it talks about this little hick girl and my father just for the hell of it used to sing it to her. Then my father was married to a woman called Clara Patricio, she had two daughters with him but he always wanted to have a son. He and Clara Patricio separated in about 1931. He left the country and my mother went with him to the consternation of my grandmother. My mother was only, lets see, 1931 and my mother was born in... 23 years old. He had to do that. He had to escape the country. And the reason my father left the country was because another senator, and there are various renditions of this. One is that the other senator was jealous of my father's ascendancy. Another school of thought is that my father somehow had a run in, not a run in basically it had something to do with a woman that he was interested in so it was over a woman. My father and him were so close that they had joined apartments. Joined singles hangout if you will. But whatever the reason, the background is he came into our town and he was a senator also from the same state, shot up City Hall, called my uncle a crook who was the

mayor. And my father kept saying, "Cool it. The guy is an older guy and he was part of the Cuban War of Independence. You've got to let him..." So finally left a little message on my father's senator's desk saying, "If you've got such big balls, why don't you show me you have them and meet me at such and such a park where I'm going to blow your head off." So my father went and my father blew his head off.

S: Wow. So this was a dual in the '30s.

M: An irregular dual. You just go in there and shoot it up. Now in 1931, now the reason my father was willing to do that, first of all it was a lot of courage, but secondly he had parliamentary immunity meaning that he could only be judged by his peers in the Senate and his peers in the Senate were aware of the situation and also they basically would have exonerated him. You know, they'd had experiences before of senators getting pissed off at each other.

S: So this was another senator?

M: Yes. Who was also Minister of State. So...

S: Under Machado?

M: Yes. So very close to Machado.

S: So was that part of the reason your father had to go in '31?

M: Yeah. Because what Machado did was he started to call members of the senate. There are only 24. So there were maybe 1/3 that were in another party. So 1/3 were against my father. So if the president could get another four or five, lets say four that makes twelve, one guy is out and he's out of majority, to come around and revoke or deny him his parliamentary immunity, then he could be judged. He shot a guy. He killed him. You know, parliamentary immunity goes out the window. So the president of the Senate, a guy called Clemente Vázquez Bello, interesting little side issue here. I stayed a hotel the last time I was in Cuba and I went to a restaurant in a beautiful home and the owner told me this is the home of Clemente Vázquez Bello in the '30s. So it is from that home that Clemente Vázquez Bello probably, cause there weren't cell phones back then, called my father and said, "Look, you better move out of here because the president is turning the Senate against you." And I had dinner there. Then my father left and he was away for seven years while there were a variety of presidents and juntas, well you know the history a little I think. And finally Batista, really through his puppet president said, you know, "You have immunity." So my father came back in 1938 with parliamentary immunity and he asked the party if they could put his name in as a candidate, just for the hell of it, just to get his name out there again, and he won.

S: To the Senate again?

M: No to the House this time. And even though this was never proven, the belief is that the person that was runner up that first contested his win paid through their

family a couple of assassins and a couple of assassins in January of 1941, days before he was supposed to take office, put eight bullets into him.

S: Into your father?

M: And his assistant and they both were killed.

S: So you were 2 or 3?

M: I was 11 months old.

S: Wow. So you never met your... or didn't have a relationship...

M: I have no recollection. Yeah. And that's the son that he supposedly wanted so my mother, who had not been working she'd basically been following my father around the world and now around Havana after he came back. My mother had... my mother was able to... rather was able to cope with it but she went into a deep, dark depression, wore black for many, many years. I remember my mother, you know, in black. And then over the years she got over it and she came to the United States on a shopping trip, buying a lot of stuff in New York and she went into Crawford's Men's Clothing, she was buying some clothing for her father, my grandfather, and the sales manager of the store sold not only the clothing, sold himself. A Max Finkelstein who was a New Yorker from Manhattan and then they got married and came back to Cuba and brought me to New York.

S: He was Jewish?

M: Yeah.

S: But your family...

M: Catholic. So then I lived in New York for two years. That was an interesting experience to be from another country not knowing the language and not having all the support networks and family and you know, in Cuba I'd just say my name and they'd say, "Are you related to the senator?" I'd say, "Yeah I'm his only son." Holy shit. They would tell me, "If you're half as smart as your dad, you'll be brilliant." And at a party they told me, "If you have half the balls of your father, you'd be a very courageous man." So I grew up with the half complex. So then we move from New York to, he got a very good job in a store running a store in Corpus Christi Texas. So we moved to Corpus Christi Texas, spent a year there. Then he got an even better job working for a steel company in Havana. And in Havana...

S: Which one?

M: Excuse me?

S: Which company?

M: Just a little tiny, Itlem Steel Corporation. No not Itlem. Multi.

S: U.S. run?

M: Yeah U.S. run. But it was really not a steel manufacturer. Steel distributor really. And he sold steel in Cuba and to Latin American from Havana. And my mother had the wisdom to ask my aunt who knew more than anybody. My aunt had been the Inspector General of public schools in Havana which is a pretty significant position and then the Minister of Culture of Havana which is like the Minister of Culture of Cuba. And my aunt said, "What do I do with the kid?" My mother rather said to my aunt... She said, "There's only one choice. You send him to Ruston Academy. It's by far the best school in the whole country." And I wound up taking the test for bachillerato and doing poorly and then taking the test for high school and doing great. And I didn't want to go to bachillerato. I wanted to stay in high school so I'm sure there was a psychological...

S: Stay in high school? How old were you when you moved from Texas?

M: 12. So I either could go the bachillerato route or I could go the high school route. I wanted to go the high school route.

S: What language were you more comfortable in at that point?

M: English.

S: You were? What was it racially like being in Texas, in Corpus Christi?

M: They thought I was a Mexican, which is the worst thing you could be particularly at that time in the world. There were the Anglos, the blacks and then the Mexicans.

S: So did that influence how you thought about Americans at all when you came back?

M: It influenced me in the sense that I said I've got to be better than I possibly could be to show these people that I'm just as good or better than they are. When I was 12 years old after having been made a lot of fun of in New York because of my accent and what have you, the teacher in Corpus Christi pulled me aside and said, "Mitch you are number one in English class." You know, after two and a half years here. And that would've been great. You know what she said then? "You must've really been something in Cuba." You know what I told her at age 11? I said, "No ma'am. In Cuba I was average. I'm glad to be in this country. I'm a little more competitive." She looked at me like who is this kid? 11 years old. She looked at me like who is this kid? What the hell is this about?

S: Had your father lived, would you have ended up at a place like Ruston?

M: I've never been asked that question. It's a good question though. We still would've asked my aunt. My aunt was the reigning expert but my aunt was the graduate of a Normal School.

S: When you say normal what do you mean?

M: Normal schools are where they train teachers.

S: Oh okay. I thought you meant like normal like public.

M: No. In Cuba they say, "Fui a la normal." And then you become a teacher. But my father went to the University of Havana and got a doctorate in education so my aunt might have been very knowledgeable but my father would've said, "Wait a second." So I don't know. I don't know what would've happened. Maybe is the best answer I can come up with not knowing my father and not knowing... he had traveled in the United States and he had been a Cuban Consul in Washington so maybe. He spoke English. I don't know. Most people realize that Ruston was the best school in Cuba.

S: More than like Belen or...

M: Oh yeah. Belen.

S: Sorry I cut you off there. Go ahead.

M: Then at Ruston I did very well and I graduated first in my high school class and I was accepted to every ivy league school, MIT and a couple of others, I think Chicago. I applied to Harvard just so I could tell Mr. Baker that I wasn't going to Harvard because I didn't get along with him very well. I was a bit of a troublemaker. So I did get into Harvard and when he met with the whole class to get to know where people were going he said, "So you're going to Harvard?" And I said, "No sir." "Where are you going?" "I'm going to Princeton."

S: But you went to MIT?

M: Well there is a sequel, a caveat, to this story. He invited me to a dinner...Chris was one year younger. Dennis was one year older. Okay. He invited me with the two of them to their house and had a wonderful dinner, took me out to the pool, invited me to a drink. I'm saying this is... I've really arrived now. I had a daiquiri, which my father was involved in developing. He didn't invent it but he... the amount of lime or what have you that he contributed. So we're sitting there and he says to me, "You're about to make a terrible mistake." I said, "Really?" He said, "Yep." He said, "Princeton is a very closed society. It's the same discrimination you experienced, you know, as a Mexican in Texas you're going to experience as a foreigner from anywhere. You could be Russian, you could be German. But you're not going to be able to get into the top clubs." Which is the way Princeton is organized. "You're going to have to go somewhere else where, you know, foreigners, maybe several foreign clubs." And he said, "You should go to a place where you're going to be valued for who you are and for your smarts and that's MIT. And you got an 800 on the SAT so that's a natural place for you." And he persuaded me. Just like my aunt, my mother's middle sister, persuaded, my mother was the youngest of the three sisters, persuaded my mother to send me to Ruston. Then Mr. Baker persuaded me to go to MIT. Two incredibly important decisions, which I really didn't have a lot to do with because I was being guided by adults. Not till much later did I begin to make my own decisions.

S: Before Finklesteen, before your mother got remarried, did she work?

M: No she had a pension from my father. No she worked before they got married as a teacher and then as they traveled around the world she didn't work. She was a stay at home mom.

S: How did you identify? Did you think of yourself as Cuban the whole time? Throughout this experience?

M: What age? When?

S: Cause it seems like you're living in between worlds in a lot of ways.

M: I identified myself as a Cuban who was very facile in English and knowledgeable of American civilization and culture and language.

S: Was your stepfather, was he a practicing Jew or no?

M: No. He wouldn't even admit that he was Jewish. He went by Mac Fields.

S: Okay. Got it. So you didn't have any association with the Jewish community in Havana?

M: No. Although I've done genetic testing and it turns out I'm 30-40 percent Jewish. Which has nothing to do with him.

S: Wow. Now what language did he and your mother speak to each other?

M: English. He spoke Spanish with a very thick accent and limited vocabulary.

S: Who were your social networks? I mean...

M: You've got to give me a moment in time.

S: When you were in high school and you returned...

M: They were my classmates. Cubans and Americans both.

S: Did you hang out with them together? Some of the people I've talked to it seems complicated.

M: Did I hang out with them together? Yeah. The big difference was that I was class of '58. We didn't hang out with '59, we didn't hang out with '57. It was us. Every once in awhile you'd date a girl from a younger group but mostly your own class.

S: What yacht clubs did you belong to?

M: Biltmore. That's the one where most of us... and also the Miramar Yacht Club. Neither of those two, by the way, are the top of the line.

S: Right the Havana...

M: And Vedado.

S: And Vedado.

M: Those were the two top... Biltmore was almost there but there were a lot of Americans and that throws a lot of things off. Are Americans lower class because of their manners because of the way they act? Or are they upper class because they're so powerful and rich?

S: So explain that dichotomy. It's interesting because some of the people I talk to like John Molanphy. I don't know if that's a name you know. I think his father was somebody under Batista in the late 50s, or grandfather. But he said the way that the upper class Cubans thought about Americans was they don't know anything.

M: They're uncouth. They're unsophisticated. They're crass. And a little bit like but not as extreme as that ugly American caricature. But at the same time, rich and powerful.

S: Now was that all Americans? Did you differentiate the Americans that you went to school with, that you socialized with and the tourists?

M: Oh of course.

S: So how did that work in your head?

M: To us we went to the best school in Cuba and we were the privileged few. All of us were going to amount to something either because of talent or connections or both. And it was an elite school for an elite. We were very proud that we all were actually convinced that we were going to the best school in the country. It would be here like going to Phillips of Andover.

S: Okay.

M: But even more so because there is also Phillips of Exeter and over there Ruston was in a category of its own.

S: And you knew the whole time that you were going to go to school in the United States?

M: It was sort of understood yeah. That everyone was going to try to go to college and probably would be able to go to college.

S: Your stepfather, who did he hang out with?

M: He was mostly friends with my family. He didn't have like a social... a separate social group. He was very much into boating so he had some friends that liked boating and in the Miramar Yacht Club we had this terrific boat.

S: How was his Spanish?

M: Very thick accent because he learned it when he was already in his 30s, 40s. So couldn't get rid of that accent. Funny accent actually. Do you know Spanish?

S: Pretty well. I'm much better at reading it.

M: Where did you learn?

S: In school and I lived a little bit in Chile. Yeah I'm going back to Chile for...

M: Have you ever been to Cuba?

S: Yeah. A few times.

M: How long?

S: I was there for a month this last time...

M: Have you been to the school?

S: No I haven't been to Ruston.

M: It's a military installation. I was able to get to the door and not one inch inside of it.

S: Got it. Do you go back often?

M: I've been back three times. Once three years ago to explore the situation. And then more recently about a year ago I went first with my best friend and then I took my family, my children and my grandkids.

S: Had they not been back before?

M: No. So I got to show them around. Quite a trip.

S: So did you go back after the revolution or no?

M: Yeah three years ago.

S: No, no, no. I mean '59 forward.

M: I went for vacation in 1960 and never went back. So from '60 to 2013, 53 years I didn't go.

S: Wow. How about your family? Did they leave early on?

M: Everybody that could left. The only thing I have there are distant either family-wise or just distant because I hardly knew them. Closest I have are a couple of cousins. Most are second and third cousins and I don't have much of a relationship with any of them.

S: Did you guys ever go outside of Havana? Did you ever go back to Ciego de Avila or no?

M: No because that was my father's town and when my father passed then I didn't go anymore. Maybe I did but it was rare.

S: When did you realize a revolution was happening?

M: January 1<sup>st</sup> of 1959 I was asleep and I woke up and there was this radio announcer saying that Batista was a thief and a scoundrel and what have you. Then I said to myself, "That guy is dead." And then they told me, "No, no he's not dead. There's been a change here." So in the morning of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1959 I knew it was a completely different deal and then three days later I really knew it was different when we all got in this caravan, my stepfather took me to the airport to leave to come back to school because I was going to MIT at the time. And everyone they let go, my class, except for me because I was born in Cuba. Of the ones who were... I mean in my class there were others born in Cuba but the ones that were in that group, that convoy of 15, 20 people...

S: The whole Ruston class is what you're talking about?

M: Not necessarily my class. 15 or 20 Rustonites. They arranged a caravan and the only one they didn't let go was me because I was born in Cuba. I had to go back for more inspections.

S: What was your family's politics during the '50s? Or were they kind of apolitical after your father?

M: No because my father was shot eight times as I mentioned and he was technically dead. And my mother ran, my mother was very coquettish and very lets say properly dressed at all times. She was in a black dress and with her hair in a tussle she went down to the emergency room and the doctor said, "I'm sorry but your husband is dead." Pretty much. He was still breathing but he had saved enough energy to tell her seven words, "**My son to Paco**," that was my uncle, "I love you." Seven words. And then he died. And my uncle Paco... he was bleeding to death. And my uncle Paco was the majority leader of the Cuban House of Representatives so the political tradition continued. And my aunt who had advised us on school still was involved, you know, in politics. As a matter of fact the Castro government chased her all over the island to kill her or to put her in jail but they couldn't find her and what she did is my mother had left by that time. She looked a lot like my mother if she dressed herself up. They sent the passport back to Cuba and she left for the second time.

S: As your mother?

M: As my mother. So my mother and my aunt left on the same passport.

S: And this was right afterwards?

M: Yeah this was shortly after the revolution.

S: So within the first few months?

M: Weeks or months. It was very quick. So all of my uncles, all of my aunts, what have you, except for my uncle Paco who didn't come until '72 so that's what? 13 years later.

S: So this is your political uncle?

M: Yeah. Uncle-in-law. He was married to my mother's sister.

S: That's interesting. So was he an opponent of Batista throughout the '50s? Was that...

M: No he was a supporter but not close... but he was a very honest man. They looked at all the people who had stolen money. He didn't appear on any of the lists so they let him alone. But they needed a piece of his farm to build a road they were building and one day my uncle woke up and he saw these people bulldozing trees, bulldozing fences and what have you and it was his property and he just became insane. He needed electroshocks. He just couldn't imagine that that could happen to a property that he owned and had worked honestly all his life for. So...

S: How did he get here in '72?

M: Applied for a visa and finally got it. Flew in.

S: When the attacks on the palace is happening you have some classmates I think like Ed Gonzalez for instance who left Cuba... you had to be somewhat aware that something was happening no?

M: Yeah but I didn't pay a lot of attention to it. I was pretty much worried about school and my grades and doing well in school. I was pretty apolitical. I thought politics and business were both terrible professions. I was going to be a scientist. Pure.

S: Wow. That changed I guess.

M: Yeah.

S: What do you think, and this is just kind of the broader question that I'm asking in this project is what is the space occupied, what influence did this Anglo American community provide, did they matter in terms of the way people viewed Americans?

M: What do you mean space?

S: What sort of influences, what sort of impact did they have in 1950s Cuba?

M: It was very large because the United States had owned most of the sugar mills and most of the electric company, the telephone company, so American economic power was huge. They also had tremendous influence on the president and the powers that be in the country. So the Americans still saw Cuba a little bit as a colony although in 1934 that changed when the Platt Amendment was negotiated away by the uncle of my father's lawyer.

S: Really?

M: Yeah. His name was Adolfo Marquez Sterling. He was a journalist and a very powerful member of the Cuban community and he came and in 1934 negotiated it away. But as soon as the United States didn't have the right to interfere, a massive exodus of American capital began. Two thirds of the sugar mills were sold, American ownership diminished tremendously but still with a lot of clout.

S: So that's why you see numbers like 60 percent of the sugar owned in 1930 and then...

M: 25 or something. You know the Platt Amendment now, his nephew was a man called Carlos Girard y Marquez Sterling who then changed his name to Carlos Marquez Sterling, you know, like my cousin was Capoto Maidique and he would go and said Maidique cause that was the... you know, my grandmother was Fernandez Serabia and she would cut the Fernandez and go straight to Serabia. You know, to find some uniqueness. And I think that the American influence is still very, very significant but a lot less than it had been when they thought of Cuba as a colony and the United States... every time that Cuba got in trouble they'd send the marines down, we've got to clean up this thing. 1912, 1916... the presidents would never want to leave. Let me give you a little data point. A little factoid. There's only one president in the history of Cuba that lost to the opposing government and actually left. Batista in 1944.

S: Oh that's right.

M: One president and he would've been one of the greats but he had to come back and that opened the door for Castro.

S: What was your awareness of the '52 coup? I mean do you remember it?

M: My uncle's best friend was a man called Colacho Perez and he became the Minister of Defense of Batista and he's the guy that set up that whole thing and a cousin of mine who's involved in export-import he was in charge of one of Cuba's airports called Aerovías Q. He used to tell me, "I couldn't believe this guy, every three or four months he would order a brand new set of Firestones. What was he doing?" He was setting up the country for Batista's coup and he later became Minister of Defense. So with the Minister of Defense of Batista's is one of my uncles' closest if not his closest friend, with my cousin, older cousin dating you know one of the women in the family of Pedraza which was the big military family. I mean we were like this with Batista.

S: So did some of your family have to leave right away?

M: Oh yeah.

S: Very quickly? Including your uncle?

M: No my uncle waited 13 years.

S: Oh that's the one who stayed.

M: He was supportive of Batista but not in the inner loop and also a very, very honest guy.

S: What did they think about the connections with U.S. mobsters and things like that?

M: It wasn't a factor of much discussion. That was more American discourse. Let me see this might be my...

S: No worries. I'm excited to have gotten an hour.

M: Let me just see what's up here. This election has...

S: What was that?

M: Let me see what she's trying to tell me. It's very small print here.

S: No worries. Time for me to check out your library.

M: I'll have to decode all that later. We're running out of time a little bit but I've got some more time.

S: No 15 minutes is fine. You gave me an hour and I'm very excited to have an hour. Alright so where was I? So how did this anti-U.S. sentiment sort of happen... cause I'm trying to understand were people seeing the United States as a Colonial force or...?

M: Well they were for almost half a century. So they basically took Cuba from Spain as a colony. Then held it for four years. They send in a bunch of people to establish the census, to establish the education system. So we were pretty much... the constitution, the capital, all along American lines. And although there wasn't a garrison of tens of thousands of people, the United States was seen as a colonial power that took advantage of Cuba. But to the Cuban upper classes that's like, "What's the problem here? We're in this thing together." But through demagoguery and through his tremendous ability to communicate, Fidel Castro and others got the Cubans thinking that they were oppressed, taken advantage of the problems of Cuba. Similarly to the discourse of Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders. The reason we have problems is because we're exploited by these wealthy people. A large share of those wealthy people are the Americans. So all of Cuba's problems are because of the United States and then when the United States came and gave them the justification to do that through the embargo, clearly it's the United States but I may have been an exception because I was going to an American school and I had spent at least half if not more of my time with Americans so I didn't sense that anti-American feeling at all. But I'm sure it was there and could be tapped into.

S: From the top up... yeah that's an interesting analysis. Just really quickly, what was your mother's name?

M: Hilda Rodriguez. I'm basically the son of a powerful political and business family. Political, professional and business family.

S: Yeah and with that placement it makes sense that you'd go to a place like Ruston. I'm trying to figure out who it attracted. You know what I mean? What did U.S. institutions offer Cubans?

M: Well certainly this great school. Also advanced education in the country. It was very easy for a Cuban to get in and out of the United States and become a student.

S: And that was pretty common too?

M: Yeah. In the upper classes.

S: But even kids who didn't go to an American school like Lafayette or Ruston? Like if somebody graduates from one of the Jesuit schools like Dolores or...?

M: You know I don't know the answer to that question. I'm sorry. There are others who could probably answer it better.

S: What about the role of Protestant institutions, was that seen as...

M: Hardly had any, in my world, any impact. It was Catholics.

S: Well I really can't thank you enough for your time. This has been...

M: I hope you'll keep me informed with your progress. When are you scheduled to defend?

S: December of next year hopefully but maybe the semester after that.

M: How many people have you interviewed? About 10 or 15?

S: About 40.

M: Oh. How many do you hope to?

S: I'll probably get to about...

M: And about 1/3 are Ruston...

S: I would say about half have been Ruston. I've interviewed a lot of people connected to the Methodist community. Some people who went to schools like Merici and a few others from...

M: But Ruston was in a different category. Even people from St Georges, from Lafayette, from... they would all say Ruston.

S: So Mary Casas, I don't know if you know her but her mother ran the Cathedral School. She would say the same thing. But then I'm also interviewing some Americans who started a farm in the '30s and lived there until the revolution pushed

them out so I'm trying to understand cause this community was so interconnected right? You have these Methodist missionaries who were living on United Fruit Company property who otherwise wouldn't have access to these things. They're building an agricultural school with people from United Fruit on the board. United Fruit is sending their children to these schools, which are informed by somebody like Boris Goldenberg. So I'm reading his work right now actually.

M: His work on Cuba?

S: Yeah the Cuban Revolution in Latin America. It's interesting. He's a good writer.

M: You know I've never, I know about the book. I've never had it in my hands.

S: Now you do have it in your hands.

M: Does it have an index?

S: It does. Lots of notes. It's my book not a library book. I don't want you to be offended by the amount of writing I've done in it.

M: Nothing on Ruston Academy.

S: It's not about Ruston. I'm like 230 pages in and its primarily focused on... it's interesting and his perspective I think is unique and informative for me. Cause I got into this project by reading the works of Ruby Hart Phillips and other members of the American colony. So him being connected... there's a good table of contents if you look in the front there.

M: How did you acquire the book?

S: Chris Baker told me about it and then I found it for like three bucks on Amazon. Just trying to read anything that came out of that community.

M: He was a helluva guy.

S: Tell me about him a little bit.

M: Well if you were a student over there in the high school, he would come to you and see, "Well, you're going to be in my history class." You understand history, you already had your plans, but this was like you were blessed by the lord. "Yes, Dr Goldenberg." So you'd go in his class and there would be eight or nine people in the class and he would portray Metternich and Talleyrand and he would assume the personalities of these people. When I, I used Palmer which is Modern European History which is the same book that's used at Princeton as a sophomore or junior. I used that book at 16 or 17 and I took the advanced placement exam in modern European history and I got a five, you know?

S: You guys were prepared. And math was it Ferrer?

M: Doctora Marta Ferrer.

S: And then Newendorf is the other name that I always here.

M: Hal Newendorf. Professor of English and coach of the basketball team. I think he passed.

S: I think most of them have. If any of them are alive I'd love to...

M: Oh yeah. Doctora Ferrera. Have you heard that name?

S: No.

M: Spanish teacher. She lives about ten blocks away from here.

S: Seriously.

M: But she's completely senile. So you could talk to her but...

S: Got it.

M: Doctora Ferrera invited me to her house when I was 16 years old. She was a stunning redhead with green eyes.

S: Cuban though?

M: Yeah. And I said, oh maybe this is the way this happens. And she said, "I have something very important to tell you." And I thought well, I guess we talk before anything happens here. And she said, "You are the best student I've had in my entire life." And I was like, that's it? And she told me, "You will go on to do great things for your community wherever you settle." Age 16. I can't forget that. Then a few months later I happened to look at her grade book and found I was second in the class. And I said, "Doctora Ferrera you told me something that wasn't true?" She said, "What's that?" I said, "You told me I was the best student and I see myself as number two." She said that's easy to explain. I grade you at this level and everybody else at this level.

S: Wow.

M: And I said yeah but I'm applying to college and I'm not going to get the, you know, assessment that's going to be fair and she looked at the final and I had like 92-94 and she changed it to 100. Okay now you're first in the class.

S: Wow.

M: But when she wrote to the various universities she said this is the best student I've ever had in my life and I have a sixteen-year teaching career. So you can't beat that. I'm sure that was very important to me getting admitted to all the places I got admitted to.

S: It's an impressive list and all the graduates I've talked to have really blown my mind. Yeah you guys have done really incredible things.

M: Great.

S: Well thank you so much for this.

M: Thank you for coming. Thank you for your interest in our little school. Do you know how to get out of here okay?

S: I think so. It's harder getting in so... I'll keep you updated and when I get the transcript of this made I'll let you know but I could send you eventually I'm going to have a list of...