



Arturo Lopez-Levy speaking at the International Institute for the Study of Cuba in London in 2008.

Straddling three worlds - Cuban, Jewish and American

Arturo Lopez-Levy is a Cuban-born Ph.D. candidate in comparative politics and a lecturer at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies. He also teaches part time at the Colorado School of Mines in Golden, Colo.

Born and raised in Cuba, Lopez-Levy is a member of that island's dwindling Jewish community, which today numbers a scant 1,500 people in a nation of more than 11 million citizens. The child of a Cuban father and a Cuban-Jewish mother descended from Turkish-Jewish immigrants, Lopez-Levy lived his early years in Cuba in two rich and unique cultures.

Lopez-Levy received his undergraduate degree from the *Instituto Superior De Relaciones Internacionales* in Havana and worked for the ministry of the interior in Cuba as a political analyst in intelligence issues and U.S.-Cuba relations. He then worked in agriculture for the Cuban government.

Lopez-Levy applied for an exit visa to the United States several times, hoping to attend graduate school, but was refused permission to leave Cuba. He chose a more circuitous route to get to the United States by leaving for Israel and applying there for a U.S. visa.

He attended Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs, earning a master of arts in International Affairs. Lopez-Levy also holds a master of arts in Economics from Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada.

With so much global experience, Lopez-Levy holds a unique perspective on education in the United States. He spoke about the “great advantage in ideological diversity” the United States holds, in contrast to Cuba, which he described as “monotonous.”

“It’s not as if there’s not diversity in Cuba, because there is,” Lopez-Levy said, in a wide-ranging interview. “But problems are generally considered under the Marxist paradigm, which is good, because people should know about the Marxist paradigm, but there are so many other paradigms.

“It’s as if they are teaching you how to repair things using a toolbox that is incomplete,” he continued. “The great advantage of American graduate education is the diversity of views.”

Lopez-Levy recently returned from Taiwan where he served as a fellow at the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy. In Taiwan, Lopez-Levy wrote about how a legacy of institutionalized authoritarianism and mixed economic conditions influenced the stability of democratic transitions in Mexico and Taiwan.

An opponent of the U.S. embargo against Cuba, Lopez-Levy is a proponent of using economic development as a means to promote human rights.

“It doesn’t make any sense to promote civil or political rights or elections disconnected from economic, cultural and social rights,” he said, using the example of Taiwan to illustrate his point. Lopez-Levy said the experience of Spain in the last stages of Franco’s dictatorship and following his death illustrates how the development of a country’s economy precedes its development as a democracy.

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*-- Shane Eric-Eugene Hensinger, master's candidate in Human Rights,
Josef Korbel School of International Studies*