Background Research
The story of Our Lady of Charity, or *La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre*, lends itself to various Cuban communities. She was allegedly found in the Bay of Nipe when the Three Juanes, two indigenous men and an enslaved African, found the dry, sixteen-inch statue of the Virgin Mary holding Jesus and a crucifix. It possessed a sign declaring her the “Virgin of Charity.” In 1916, the Vatican named her the patroness of Cuba.

Methods
In this paper, I look at how Cuba’s enslaved population utilized *La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre* as a source of agency by allowing practitioners of the Yoruba tradition to maintain the appearance of Catholicism. Furthermore, I address how the syncretism of *Caridad del Cobre* evolved over time and became associated with Cuban nationalism, resulting in a figure that exists between religious traditions and cultures, bridging together Cuba’s Afro-Cuban, white, and mixed-race populations. Moreover, I discuss her significance in the Cuban struggle against Spain, both in the nineteenth-century wars for independence and in the twentieth-century Cuban revolution. Finally, I examine her continued role in today’s exile and diaspora communities.

Beyond Cuba
*La Ermita de la Caridad* symbolizes more than religious devotion. For the Cuban diaspora, *Caridad del Cobre*’s shrine allows the community to express their faith and a spiritual connection to the island they were compelled to leave. The mural surrounding her depicts pivotal moments in Cuban history. In the present, she continues to symbolize freedom and hope for the diaspora.

Our Lady of Charity’s significance rests in the opportunity she has presented for marginalized groups in Cuba to exercise agency, resist oppression, and instill hope in its communities (a phenomenon that has transcended borders, as evidenced by today’s exilic and diaspora community). Historically, various groups have claimed her, and the legacy of those claims have resulted a powerful tool of resilience and reconciliation.