

## CUBAN PATRIOTS IN KEY WEST, 1878-1886: GUARDIANS AT THE SEPARATIST IDEAL

by GERALD E. POYO

**T**HE signing of the Zanjón Pact in February 1878 signaled the termination of the Cuban Ten Years War, the first phase of the island's efforts to gain freedom from Spain. However, for many Cubans the treaty represented only a temporary setback, and in Key West it was clear from the start the community would not accept the pact.<sup>1</sup> During the next decade separatist activity continued unabated, though actual fighting was sporadic at best and never a serious threat to Spanish domination.

Key West played an important role in protecting and perpetuating the Cuban separatist ideal during these years; an effort that by the mid-1880s had earned it a reputation as the primary rebel center in the United States. Indeed, on coming to Key West for the first time in 1884, the rebel chieftain Maximo Gomez noted in his diary, "we arrived in Key West . . . where the best of the Cuban emigre centers exists."<sup>2</sup> By the end of the decade, José Martí also recognized the importance of the Key, and the newly-established community in Tampa, and based his rise to prominence on this constituency.

Key West became central to the separatist cause through a patriotic and dedicated populace, able and spirited local leaders, and a prosperous cigar industry that provided the necessary financial resources to support the revolution, but, not without considerable sacrifice and frequent setbacks. In fact, it seems that the colony verged on disintegration in 1878 when a period of economic deprivation and political demoralization set in.

Though the colony vehemently rejected the pact with Spain, a recession in the late 1870s hurt the local cigar industry forcing

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1. See Gerald E. Poyo, "Key West and the Cuban Ten Years War," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, LVII (January 1979), 289-307, for an account of Cuban activities during the first decade of the rebellion.
2. Máximo Gómez, *Diario de campaña, 1868-1898* (Havana, 1968), 177.

many Cubans to return to Havana or move north to Jacksonville and New York. High unemployment, labor unrest, and the departure of workers characterized the city throughout 1878 and the following year, hardly a promising environment for pressing on with revolutionary activity. Despite these problems, a dedicated few initiated the task of reorganizing the embattled community.<sup>3</sup>

In August 1878, a secret patriotic society, *Orden del Sol*, formed to propagate Cuban liberty, and on October 12, a prominent community leader, José Dolores Poyo, established a revolutionary newspaper called *El Yara*.<sup>4</sup> Named in honor of the town where Cuban independence was proclaimed, *El Yara* became a symbol of the dedication and selflessness with which the Latin colony in south Florida continued to agitate for Cuban independence.

These developments proceeded in conjunction with activities in New York where General Calixto García, one of the most prestigious figures of the Ten Years War, arrived to take command of the revolutionary junta. He reorganized the rebels into the *Comité Revolucionario Cubano*, and issued a manifesto calling his compatriots to arms. Encouraging news arrived from many emigre centers and Cuba, including the information that on November 9, activists in Key West had gathered at San Carlos Hall to establish the *Club Revolucionario Cubano de Cayo Hueso*. After electing officers and listening to rousing speeches by Martin Herrera, long-time director of San Carlos, and José Francisco Lamadriz, representing the New York committee, the club notified García that it would support his efforts.<sup>5</sup> That December, forty Key West women, led by Rosario Lamadriz, L. Piedad Figueredo, and Clara, Celia, and América Poyo, formed the *Club Hijas de la Libertad*. It became during the next two decades one of the most active organizations backing Cuban independence.<sup>6</sup> Throughout the following year revolutionary clubs were orga-

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3. Cuba, *Boletín del archivo nacional*, VIII, 98; Poyo, "Key West and the Cuban Ten Years War," 305.

4. Raoul Alpízar Poyo, *Cayo Hueso y José Dolores Poyo: Dos símbolos patrios* (Havana, 1947), 57-60; Gerardo Castellanos García, *Motivos de Cayo Hueso* (Havana, 1935), 222.

5. Juan J. E. Casasús, *La emigración cubana y la independencia de la patria* (Havana, 1953), 167; Cuba, Archivo Nacional, *Documentos para servir la historia de la Guerra Chiquita*, 3 vols. (Havana, 1949-1950), I, 106.

6. Alpízar Poyo, *Cayo Hueso y José Dolores Poyo*, 44; Cuba, Archivo Nacional, *Documentos para servir la historia de la Guerra Chiquita*, I, 115-16.

nized, and at a mass meeting in early June the community reaffirmed its commitment to give to General García "all our material and moral support, without restriction." This resolution was sent to New York, and it was published in *El Yara*.<sup>7</sup>

After a year of careful planning and organizing, rebellions finally erupted in central and eastern Cuba in late August 1879. The following month García launched an expedition commanded by General Gregorio Benítez, which reached the island successfully. Unable to raise a significant force, however, it was quickly defeated. While the failure did not discourage activists in Key West, the community's continuing economic problems during 1878 and 1879 threatened to undermine their financial base. In previous years rebels collected thousands of dollars from the tobacco workers, but now that chore would be difficult.

A brief strike by the cigar makers in July 1878 foreshadowed a period of labor unrest that added to the growing complexity of the situation. During the first half of 1879, the Key West revolutionary clubs sent only modest sums to New York, and prospects for increasing those sums dwindled during the summer when another strike occurred. The work stoppage the previous year had underscored how vulnerable the workers really were, and it prompted activity that resulted in the establishment of unions among the cigar makers, selectors, classers, and strippers. All operated under the umbrella of a "general union" with a central board composed of representatives of each occupation. The general union, or *Unión de Tabaqueros*, sought to unify the workers traditionally splintered by trade, hoping to establish sufficient leverage to gain recognition from the factory owners. In addition, the workers demanded the creation of industry-wide standardized wage scales and the regularization of lax cigar classification procedures that had traditionally allowed the manufacturers to pay cheaper prices for the finer cigars.

The strike succeeded as the industry came to a virtual standstill; the first time labor effectively closed it down in Key West. Writing to the revolutionary leadership in New York, Cecilio Henríquez, president of the Key West *Club Revolucionario* wrote, "with great sentiment it was resolved to inform that center that currently it is impossible to respond to your request because

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7. Cuba, Archivo Nacional, *Documentos para servir la historia de la Guerra Chiquita*, II, 146-47.

of the financial situation in this locality." The rebel leaders promised to continue working, but emphasized little could be expected until the crisis passed.<sup>8</sup>

In New York, General García announced plans to travel to Key West, no doubt hoping to heighten patriotic sentiment and encourage a settlement of the dispute. Accompanied by Lamadriz, he docked at 6 a.m., on November 13, disembarking to the thunder of a twenty-one gun salute and the sounds of a cheering crowd. Throughout the day García and Lamadriz met with various committees, attended a concert by the San Carlos children's band, and attended a dance given in their honor that evening. The general also met with Mayor Livingston Bethel, a strong supporter of Cuban independence, and the city council sent a message of congratulations to the celebrating Cubans.<sup>9</sup>

Several days later the workers settled the strike, suggesting the general's intervention in the matter had helped bring about a settlement which would benefit the revolutionary cause. A compromise in the dispute had been agreed to by both sides. The workers accepted modest wage increases in return for recognition of the union and a standard industry price list.<sup>10</sup> Despite his best efforts, however, García was not able to raise the kind of money he had hoped for before he had to return to New York to prepare his expedition. It was announced, however, that Lamadriz would remain permanently in Key West; it was hoped that his presence would aid in keeping the community's enthusiasm high. A veteran revolutionary, Lamadriz had been involved in anti-Spanish activities since the 1840s, and he was prominent in New York during the Ten Years War. His move to Key West strengthened the local leadership's influence.<sup>11</sup>

Lamadriz's position in New York was filled by a relatively unknown Cuban who arrived from Spain late in the year. His name was José Martí, and after contacting Garcia, he took Lamadriz's vacated seat on the *Comité's* board of directors. At a mass meeting on January 24, 1880, the new arrival delivered his

8. Cuba, Archivo Nacional, *Documentos para servir la historia de la Guerra Chiquita*, I, 216, 233; II, 216, 274; *Cigar Makers' Official Journal*, December 10, 1879.

9. Cuba, Archivo Nacional, *Documentos para servir la historia de la Guerra Chiquita*, III, 17-18.

10. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, November 18, 1879.

11. Casasús, *La emigración cubana y la independencia de la patria*, 160-63, 421.

first speech to the exile communities, establishing himself as a highly articulate and progressive member of the revolutionary leadership. No one at the time could have known that Martí would eventually emerge as the main leader of the Cuban independence struggle, but his eloquent call for unity and racial harmony in rebel ranks struck a responsive chord among the multiracial Cuban tobacco workers attending the New York meeting. Published as a pamphlet, and likely read aloud in cigar factories as was then the custom, the message received a warm reception in Key West, introducing the tobacco workers to the man, who, with their support, would lead the final assault on Spanish authority in Cuba a decade later.<sup>12</sup>

In the spring of 1879, García sailed from Jersey City with a small contingent of twenty-seven expeditionaries, landing in Cuba three weeks later. News of his arrival, together with the announcement that Lamadriz had been named agent for the revolution in the United States, was the cause for a celebration in Key West, starting with parades led by the *Unión de Tabaqueros* and the *Club Hijos de la Libertad*, and concluding with the usual grand meeting at San Carlos. Although 6,000 rebels responded to García's landing, they were inadequately armed and financed, a problem the emigre communities could not remedy. Of equal detriment to the insurrection was García's inability to link-up with a large body of rebels before his capture in early August, and General Antonio Maceo's failure to reach the island at all.<sup>13</sup> Without prominent leaders to coordinate and legitimize the effort, the rebels could not resist the swift Spanish reaction that crushed the incipient revolt. The last insurgent leader, General Emilio Núñez, surrendered in September 1879, and the *Comité* in New York disbanded, suspending the publication of its newsweekly, *La Independencia*.<sup>14</sup>

12. José Martí, *Obras completas*, 27 vols. (Havana, 1963-1965), IV, 183-211; Cuba, Archivo Nacional, *Documentos para servir la historia de la Guerra Chiquita*, III, 114.
13. Cuba, Archivo Nacional, *Documentos para servir la historia de la Guerra Chiquita*, III, 154-55. Maceo had been denied the leadership of the first expedition led by General Benítez because he was a mulatto, and he was unable to reach Cuba later as planned. Martí's plea for racial harmony in his first speech was undoubtedly a reference to this incident.
14. José L. Franco, *Antonio Maceo: Apuntes para una historia de su vida*, 3 vols. (Havana, 1975), I, 206-16; Philip S. Foner, *A History of Cuba and Its Relations With the United States*, 2 vols. (New York, 1963), II, 286-87; Luís Estévez y Romero, *Desde el Zanjón hasta Baire*, 2 vols. (Havana, 1974), I, 127-28.

The *Guerra Chiquita*, as this brief insurrection is known, was a desperate effort to reinitiate the revolt immediately after the Zanjón Pact. In its traditional manner, Key West contributed what it could, but, given the stringent economic conditions, labor unrest, and the departure of significant numbers of Cubans from the isle at that time, the community could not assume a very large financial burden. Enthusiasm, however, was never lacking, and revolutionary zeal did not wane in Key West after General García's surrender as it did in other communities. The local patriot society remained intact, and *El Yara* did not miss an issue as Cuban exiles again scattered throughout the Caribbean and the United States, most waiting for a resumption of the struggle. The dispersed Cubans relied on the Key West weekly for news of conspiratorial organizing and gained inspiration from the patriotic exhortations of prominent figures like Maceo who contributed to its columns. Also, sympathizers of independence regularly smuggled *El Yara* into Cuba, allowing supporters there to stay in touch with exile activities.<sup>15</sup> During these years of reduced rebel activity, the Key West newspaper acquired a reputation for persistence in its call for a free Cuba, playing a vital role in keeping the independence ideal in the forefront of community awareness.<sup>16</sup>

After the demise of the rebellion in 1880, many rebels went to Key West, and during the next five years the Cuban population there increased significantly; this migration was attributable mainly to the recovering cigar industry. Among the political exiles who arrived, giving the local leadership additional prestige, was Fernando Figueredo, a veteran of the Ten Years War, who with Maceo and others, had rejected the Zanjón Pact and had continued fighting until surrender became inevitable. Along with Lamadriz and Poyo, Figueredo became an influential leader in the community, and was the first Cuban elected to the Florida legislature in 1884. Soon after Figueredo's arrival he presented a series of lectures at San Carlos describing his experience during

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15. Antonio Maceo, *Ideología política: Cartas y otros documentos*, 2 vols. (Havana, 1950), I, 192-202; Eusebio Hernández, *Maceo: Dos conferencias históricas* (Havana, 1968), 134; Castellanos García, *Motivos de Cayo Hueso*, 222-23; Juan J.E. Casasús, *Ramón Leocadio Bonachea: El jefe de vanguardia* (Havana, 1955), 250-51.
  16. Ramiro Guerra y Sánchez, ed., *Historia de la nación cubana*, 10 vols. (Havana, 1952), V, 358.

the Ten Years War. These were subsequently published as *La Revolución de Yara*, and provide one of the classic accounts of that struggle. He also founded a short-lived newspaper, *La Voz de Hatuey*, whose militancy prompted complaints from the Spanish ambassador in Washington, and criticism from the local Anglo press that condemned what it considered the weekly's advocacy of violence against loyal Spaniards in Key West.<sup>17</sup> Figueredo's activities were clearly calculated to keep the issue of Cuban independence in the public arena.

Other arrivals in Key West during these years who also worked for the renewal of separatist activities were Gerardo Castellanos, José Rogelio Castillo, and Enrique Canals, all veterans of the first decade of struggle. The first two opened small cigar establishments while Castillo went to work as a typographer for *El Yara*.<sup>18</sup> The presence of these veterans helped keep the revolutionary ambience flourishing in Key West.

In this environment, it was not long before signs of patriot activism again appeared. In 1883 Cubans in Key West, New York, and Philadelphia held meetings to celebrate October 10, the anniversary of the proclamation of their independence. These gatherings grew out of the activities of another rebel veteran, Ramón L. Bonachea, who had begun travelling to the emigre centers earlier in the year seeking funds for an expeditionary force. He obtained backing from various Cuban patriotic societies in the United States and publicity in *El Yara* and in the New York revolutionary press.<sup>19</sup>

Some Cubans, however, considered the moment not yet ripe for reinitiating rebel activities and they viewed this organizing activity with some dismay. Watching revolutionary developments closely from Honduras, Antonio Maceo feared that secondary leaders initiating isolated, uncoordinated activities, only wasted valuable resources. He regarded Bonachea's manner of proceed-

17. Casasús, *La emigración cubana y la independencia de la patria*, 402-03; Manuel Deulofeu y Lleonart, *Héroes del destierro* (Cienfuegos, 1904), 81; Fernando Figueredo, *La revolución de Yara*, 2 vols. (Havana, 1968), I, 41-45; U.S., National Archives, Microfilm Publications, *Notes From the Spanish Legation in the United States to the Department of State*, November 10, 1883.

18. Gómez, *Diario de campaña*, 177; José Rogelio Castillo, *Autobiografía del general José Rogelio Castillo* (Havana, 1973), 63-64.

19. Casasús, *La emigración cubana y la independencia de la patria*, 184, 189-90; Casasús, *Ramón Leocadio Bonachea*, 174-75; Guerra y Sánchez, ed., *Historia de la nación cubana*, V, 358-60.

ing, especially his penchant for issuing proclamations, calling mass meetings, and generally creating much publicity, as unproductive, and he suggested that rather than supporting these kinds of ventures, the revolutionary press should concentrate on publicizing the oppressive nature of Spanish rule in Cuba.<sup>20</sup> Despite Maceo's criticisms revolutionaries in Key West and New York continued working with Bonachea.

The exile communities became even more active when another revolutionary of secondary stature, Carlos Aguero, who had been carrying on guerrilla operations in Cuba since 1882, arrived in Key West in 1883 to try to raise a force. To the dismay of the community, however, local authorities arrested him early the next year after the Spanish requested his extradition. During the Ten Years War Aguero had commanded several forces and acted as aide-de-camp to the noted General Julio Sanguily, who had visited Key West in 1877. The Spanish called Aguero a bandit who was wanted in Cuba as a common criminal in connection with his guerrilla activities. Angered by his detention, Cubans in Key West threatened the Spanish consul, prompting federal authorities to dispatch agents with instructions to survey the situation and guarantee the diplomat's safety. Naval vessels also arrived in the area to guard against the departure of expeditions to Cuba.

Meanwhile, members of Florida's congressional delegation and the state's lieutenant governor, former Key West Mayor Livingston Bethel, introduced resolutions and lobbied in the Congress against turning Aguero over to Spanish authorities. A resolution demanded that the president prevent his delivery "until it shall be ascertained that the charges against him are true," and it called on the United States attorney general to investigate and to prevent extradition if the request appeared to be politically motivated.

After a hearing in Key West on February 21, 1884, United States District Judge James Locke released Aguero. This action sparked a great demonstration 5,000 strong, that included the mayor, collector of customs, and Lieutenant Governor Bethel. A short time later Aguero slipped out of Key West for Cuba, where

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20. Maceo, *Ideología política: Cartas y otros documentos*, I, 219-24, 226-27, 230-34.

with a small band of men he conducted guerrilla warfare for almost a year before finally being defeated and killed.

Concerned that the troubles in south Florida would interfere with a reciprocal trade agreement then being negotiated with Spain, President Chester Arthur requested the removal of customs collector Frank Wicker, a vocal sympathizer of the Cuban cause, after a formal Spanish protest to the secretary of state had decried his participation in pro-Cuban demonstrations. Suspecting that Wicker and his Cuban deputy collector, Ramón Álvarez, were unwilling to uphold effectively the neutrality laws, the treasury department sent an agent to the Key to supervise the customs house and to insure that proper vigilance be maintained. Although Florida politicians attempted to gain a special hearing for Wicker, the United States Senate, after three hours of debate on April 22, adopted its commerce committee's report advising his removal. More threats against the Spanish consul in Key West followed, and the United States Secretary of State fired off a telegram to Governor Edward A. Perry in Tallahassee demanding that order be maintained.<sup>21</sup>

Hearing of the enthusiasm of the Cubans in south Florida and elsewhere in the United States, the rebel veteran, Máximo Gomez, then in Honduras, sent an envoy to New York with a proposed plan of action for initiating new conspiracies. The New York leadership received Gomez's representative warmly, with assurances they were willing to follow the general's initiatives. Furthermore, a wealthy Cuban, Félix Govin, offered \$200,000 to the cause, settling Gómez's financial concerns and prompting him and Maceo to set out immediately for the United States. After a rather subdued reception in New Orleans, the two veterans received a tumultuous greeting in Key West where they met with community leaders and comrades of the Ten Years War.<sup>22</sup>

After four days of talks, Gómez called a general meeting in a cigar factory and detailed his plans to the local leaders, out of which emerged a formal organization whose members agreed to

21. U.S., Congress, Senate *Journal*, 48th Cong., 1st Sess., 272; House, *Journal*, 48th Cong., 1st Sess., 531, 635; *House Executive Documents*, 48th Cong., 2nd Sess., I, 493-95, 502-21; Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, February 12, 26, April 4, 15, 22, 29, May 20, June 3, 1884; *New York Herald*, January 10, March 4, 1885; U.S., National Archives, *Notes From the Spanish Legation*, see correspondence for 1883-1884.

22. José L. Franco, *Ruta de Antonio Maceo en el Caribe* (Havana, 1961), 93-107; Gómez, *Diario de campaña*, 177-78.

work secretly to establish revolutionary clubs. At a meeting of the first such organization, the *Club Carlos Manuel de Céspedes*, members resolved to place Bonachea, still preparing his departure for Cuba in the Caribbean, under Gómez's orders.<sup>23</sup> Bonachea proceeded on his own, however, landing in Cuba later that year, where, after a brief struggle, he was captured and executed. In a letter to Poyo and Figueredo written just prior to his execution, the expeditionary leader asked that the people in Key West care for his family and educate his children. The following year, 1885, the Bonacheas arrived in Florida from Mexico and established their home in Key West.<sup>24</sup>

The Bonachea and Aguero experiences lent credence to Maceo's original estimation that it would take prominent revolutionary figures with adequately financed and coordinated expeditions to revolutionize Cuba, but their activities did serve to reinitiate organizing efforts. Undoubtedly, emigre leaders in the United States recognized that the prominent veterans could lead the rebellion more effectively, but since they failed to take the initiative in 1883, support was given to those who did. The response to Bonachea's and Aguero's calls for revolution demonstrated that, at least in the emigre communities, the moment seemed right for another round of organizing.

The potential for raising well-financed expeditions had increased substantially by the mid-1880s. Besides obtaining the traditional support of the workers in Key West, Gómez and Maceo also attracted a group of prosperous Cuban cigar manufacturers to the organizing sessions. During the late 1870s, Cuban-owned factories usually were modest enterprises struggling to survive in a poor economic environment made worse by constant labor agitation and strikes. This kind of situation did not promote significant contributions to the rebel cause. After 1880 however, the industry in Key West grew; forty-five factories increased to ninety-one by 1884, capital investments expanded from \$429,400 to \$683,000, and the average number of hands rose from 1,377 to 2,811. Most significant was a sharp rise in wages, from \$337,966 in 1880, to \$2,500,000 four years later. Wages

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23. Casasús, *La emigración cubana y la independencia de la patria*, 187-88; Gómez, *Diario de campaña*, 177.

24. Casasús, *Ramón Leocadio Banachea*, 219; Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, August 27, 1885.

disbursed by the industry had reached \$1,000,000 in 1875, but the depressed earnings during the latter years of the decade indicates why funds could not be readily obtained for the *Guerra Chiquita*.

Seven of the Cuban cigar manufacturers attending the organizing sessions in Key West represented a capital investment of \$187,000, and their combined profits were over \$400,000 in 1884-1885. The largest of these manufacturers was Eduardo H. Gato, whose enterprise had expanded rapidly after the depression of the late 1870s. Employing only fifty men in 1880, Gato's factory increased its labor force to an average of 435 by 1884. His capital investment was approximately \$100,000.<sup>25</sup> The expanding operations of the manufacturers and the increased earnings of their workers insured that funds would be available for the rebel leaders in 1885.

During their brief stay in Key West in 1884, Gómez and Maceo raised some \$5,000, to be utilized as operating expenses until Govin in New York provided the funds he had offered. Arriving in New York in late September the two generals were joined by José Martí, now one of the leading exile personalities in America. Though news of the renewed activism was well received in New York, events soon soured the initial optimism. Govin retracted his financial commitment, explaining he was involved in delicate negotiations with Spanish authorities to recover property in Cuba. The revolutionaries were forced to devise other plans for a major fund raising drive. A disagreement between Gómez and Martí followed, resulting in the latter's withdrawal from the revolutionary effort. This action deprived the rebels in 1884 of Martí's extraordinary ability, so evident in the 1890s, to mobilize the Cuban emigre centers.<sup>26</sup>

Not allowing these setbacks to dampen their spirits, Gómez and Maceo directed agents to all the cities offering possibilities of

25. Alpizar Poyo, *Cayo Hueso y José Dolores Poyo*, 73; New York *Tobacco Leaf*, July 3, 1880; Walter Maloney, *Sketch of the History of Key West, Florida* (Newark, 1876; facsimile ed., Gainesville, 1968), 25; U.S., Census Office, Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, *Statistics of Manufactures*, 207; Florida State Census, 1885, Microfilm population schedules, Monroe County. Statistical data taken from the 1885 census should be viewed with caution since the figures are obviously just crude estimates. The wage figure for 1885, for example, is higher than wages paid in the whole state in 1890. In any case, a significant increase in wages paid between 1880 and 1885 is apparent.

26. Franco, *Antonio Maceo: Apuntes para una historia de su vida*, 267-74.

support. Gómez selected his aide Rafael Rodríguez to go to Key West, where he immediately began forming an expedition. Strained labor-management relations, however, threatened the disruption of community focus on insurgent activities. After two bitterly disputed strikes in 1880 and 1881, labor agitation had declined and the economy became more prosperous. However, worker concerns again appeared in 1883, when an influx of laborers from Cuba threatened wage rates and job security, and after manufacturers began taking advantage of relaxed union activity to return to some of their earlier practices, the most objectionable being underclassifying the finer cigars. In 1883, the selectors reorganized their union and by September 1884, the cigar makers and other occupations had followed suit. Preparing for the worst, the manufacturers also reorganized, electing as officers of their trade association Cuban factory owners prominently connected with the revolutionary cause. This was an apparent attempt to use their influence within the rebel movement to intimidate the workers. Although the strike did not develop immediately, the lines were drawn and all expected it would eventually come.<sup>27</sup>

Revolutionary concerns again gained prominence in the colony when Dr. Eusebio Hernández, collaborating closely with Gómez and Maceo, arrived in Key West in early January 1885, hoping to raise at least \$20,000. He and Gómez had estimated that \$55,000 would be needed for the first expedition, and in considering quotas for the various centers, it was thought that only Panama could produce the equal of Key West. The other proposed fundraising locations were Philadelphia, New Orleans, and Kingston (Jamaica), each estimated to produce \$3,000; Santo Domingo, \$1,000; and New York, \$5,000. Key West became the primary locale for raising needed financial resources.<sup>28</sup>

On arriving, Hernández obtained the active cooperation of Lamadriz and Poyo, and the three initiated their rounds of the cigar factories. Cigar manufacturers Gato, Cayetano Soría, Francisco Marrero, Enrique Canals, and Carlos Recio one of the most prosperous merchants on the isle, offered to loan the revolu-

27. New York *Tobacco Leaf*, October 25, 1884; Key West, *La voz de Hatuey*, March 1, 1884, a copy is included in U.S. National Archives, *Notes From the Spanish Legation*, March 17, 1884.

28. Hernández, *Maceo: Dos conferencias históricas*, 144; Hortensia Pichardo, ed., *Máximo Gómez: Cartas a Francisco Carrillo* (Havana, 1971), 39.

tion \$30,000. With another \$10,000 collected from the workers, Hernández had doubled what the leadership in New York had thought could be obtained in south Florida. Although Hernández accepted the manufacturers' loan, he later observed, "I do not censure those who loan their money at times where money is the principal factor; no, but permit me to applaud those who give with all their heart and their soul." Deeply moved by the enthusiasm and sacrifice of the tobacco workers, Hernández cabled Gómez in New Orleans, inviting him to come to Key West to receive personally the funds. On arriving he assured the colony that rebel forces would soon be battling in Cuba.<sup>29</sup>

Soon after the revolutionary leaders' departure from Key West, news arrived that Aguero had been killed in Cuba. His death stunned the community, and some wondered if a foothold on Cuban soil could now be established. On March 22, 1885, the Key West community met to honor Aguero, Bonachea, and others who had recently died while fighting Spanish authority in their homeland. People filled San Carlos Hall, and as a *New York Herald* correspondent described it, "Inside the hall, as the exterior of the building, was heavily draped with emblems of mourning. On the platform the catafalque erected was strewn with choice flowers, while lighted candles and a skull and cross bones . . . gave the whole a decidedly funeral appearance. The ceremonies lasted several hours, and consisted principally of dirges by a brass band, singing of hymns by the audience and the delivery of eulogies on the departed."<sup>30</sup>

Throughout that summer, rebels continued their preparations, but the expeditions formed slowly, and growing concerns about working conditions caused increasing dissatisfaction among the Key's Cuban labor force. During the first week in August the long-awaited confrontation with the owners finally erupted, bringing cigar production to a halt. Labor leaders demanded wage increases, regularized cigar classification procedures, and worker election of factory foremen. The manufacturers were unwilling to yield; they hoped to outlast union strike funds, reputed to be small. After a month strike monies indeed gave out,

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29. Hernández, *Maceo: Dos conferencias históricas*, 145-47; Castellanos García, *Motivos de Cayo Hueso*, 232; George Chapin, *Florida, 1513-1913, Past, Present, and Future*, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1914), II, 313-14.

30. *New York Herald*, March 23, 1885.

forcing the union to send representatives to New York and Havana, where some support funds were raised. Spanish officials in Havana usually cooperated with strikers from Key West, knowing that it benefited not only Cuban industry, but more importantly it weakened the revolutionary organizations. Recognizing this as well, rebel leaders joined in the negotiating sessions after several bargaining meetings held in New York failed to provide a solution. An agreement finally emerged after the major stumbling block, the issue of worker election of foremen, was settled in a compromise allowing union representatives into the factories to investigate grievances, but leaving the foreman as a management position. Rafael Rodríguez, Gómez's aide in Key West, officially witnessed the final agreement. Once again the revolutionary element within the Key West community contributed to settling a strike, and the factories were soon back in full operation.<sup>31</sup>

The settlement of the dispute came at an opportune moment because in September 1885, the local revolutionary leaders received a cable from New York explaining that Maceo and Hernández wished to visit for another fund-raising effort. Having travelled to New Orleans and New York where they met with limited success, the two decided that another jaunt to Key West was necessary, though Hernández expressed some reluctance, feeling the city had already contributed more than its share. Nevertheless, the two wasted little time after receiving a reply urging them to come. Arriving in October, they were met in the traditional manner by a crowd at the docks. Loud cheers, a twenty-one gun salute, and a procession to San Carlos Hall led by the Cuban brass band in a drenching rain initiated a week of activities.

At San Carlos Hernández took the podium to explain why the insurrection had not yet erupted, but the crowd packing the building interrupted, shouting that explanations were unnecessary and expressing support for the expedition. After Maceo's speech, men began emptying money from their pockets and women removed jewelry, turning it all over to the fund raising committee. Viewing this scene with delight and with tears of emotion swelling in his eyes, Maceo saw again the willingness of

31. Ibid., August 4, 5, 25, September 2, 1885; New York *Tobacco Leaf*, August 29, September 12, 1885, quoted in L. Glenn Westfall, *Don Vicente Martínez Ybor, The Man and His Empire* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Florida, Gainesville, 1977), 43-46.

the Key West community to support the Cuban cause. Throughout the week, *La Semana Patriótica*, speech-making and fund-raising activities in the cigar factories provided Maceo with almost \$10,000 for his expedition.<sup>32</sup>

The enthusiasm and euphoria created by the successes in Key West gave way to disillusionment during the first half of 1886 because of a series of setbacks. Having decided to launch his expedition from the Dominican Republic, his homeland, Gómez sent the war materials there from New York during late 1885, but an unexpected change in government unsympathetic to Cuban exile activities, resulted in Gómez's arrest and confiscation of the arms. Although the general was soon released, he was deported, and the war materials could not be recovered, delaying any possible invasion of Cuba for months.<sup>33</sup>

Though distressed by the loss of the weapons, Cubans in Key West continued supporting the revolt until their attention was distracted by their own disaster that struck in the early morning hours of March 30, 1886. As the population slept, a fire broke out in the San Carlos Hall which quickly spread out of control enveloping large portions of the city. Before it could be extinguished some 600 buildings worth an estimated \$2,000,000 were destroyed, a disaster unprecedented in the city's history. The fire leveled eighteen cigar factories, including the Martínez Ybor and Seidenburg establishments, two of the largest, sharply curtailing economic activity in the community. The *Unión de Tabaqueros* distributed \$900 among its members and donated another \$480 to the city-wide relief fund, but hundreds of Cuban workers, homeless, unemployed, and ruined, left by steamer for Cuba, or sailed up the coast to Ybor City where a nascent cigar industry offered some hope of work.<sup>34</sup>

Details regarding how the fire started are not clear, but some suspected it was not accidental.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps a Spanish agent's attempt to destroy San Carlos, symbolic of the revolutionary com-

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32. Hernández, *Maceo: Dos conferencias históricas*, 154-56.

33. Franco, *Antonio Maceo: Apuntes para una historia de su vida*, I, 292.

34. Jefferson B. Browne, *Key West: The Old and the New* (St. Augustine, 1912; facsimile ed., Gainesville, 1973), 125, 152-53; Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, April 8, 15, 1886; Deulofeu y Leonart, *Héroes del destierro*, 31; José Rivero Muñiz, "Los cubanos en Tampa," *Revista bimestre cubana*, LXXIV (January-June 1958), 206-13; *New York Herald*, March 31, April 1, 3, 12, 15, 1886.

35. Browne, *Key West: The Old and the New*, 152.

munity, developed into something more than was intended. When informed of the catastrophe, Gómez indicated he was not surprised, suggesting that he believed the Spanish may have been behind it.<sup>36</sup> Whatever the cause, it resulted in paralyzing and hopelessly demoralizing the revolution's most active center of support, depriving the insurgents of critically needed financial resources and moral backing. Any hope of raising sufficient funds to replace the Dominican losses virtually disappeared.

These developments caused many to reconsider their commitment. In Key West the leadership appraised the situation and urged Gómez to halt temporarily organizing activities because of the community's economic paralysis. Rodríguez also wrote the general explaining that there was little hope now of mobilizing the community.<sup>37</sup>

Despite the news from Key West, Gómez and Maceo felt a responsibility to the conspirators in Cuba, and they were determined to continue their activities. Maceo addressed an open letter to the "Emigres of Key West," explaining, among other things, that his expedition was in its final stages of preparation and that he would soon be in Cuba. He asked for continued support.<sup>38</sup> The expedition never departed, however, for in July 1886, the shipment of arms destined for his men in Jamaica was thrown into the sea by a steamer captain fearful of being apprehended.

If insurrectionary activities were to continue now, another major fund-raising drive would be necessary, and in August, Maceo, Gómez, Hernández, and others met in Jamaica to discuss their options. By now Maceo advocated abandoning activities for the time being, but Hernández insisted that a last attempt be undertaken. Gómez expressed support, and Hernández set sail for Key West to explore the possibility of initiating another fund-raising drive.<sup>39</sup> Although he was received cordially, Hernández did find the Cuban leaders firmly opposed to the contemplated effort. Besides the negative impact of the fire and the loss of arms on rebel enthusiasm, increasing labor activism among the tobacco workers was causing disunity in the community. Opposing Cuban labor organizations had already clashed over the politics and con-

36. Pichardo, ed., *Máximo Gómez: Cartas a Francisco Carrillo*, 52.

37. Gómez, *Diario de campaña*, 206; Pichardo, ed., *Máximo Gómez: Cartas a Francisco Carrillo*, 58.

38. Maceo, *Ideología política: Cartas y otros documentos*, I, 313-14.

39. Franco, *Antonio Maceo: Apuntes para una historia de su vida*, I, 312.

duct of a strike in January 1886, and early the next year blood was shed in Tampa in a similar incident. Also, the tendency of pro-separatist labor and revolutionary leaders to discourage strikes and confrontations, and the high visibility of Cuban cigar manufacturers in the rebel organizations caused skepticism among many workers who suspected the factory owners were using the revolution to prevent labor struggles.<sup>40</sup>

Again assessing the general situation in Key West, local leaders repeated their advice to the revolutionary chiefs that another fund-raising drive would not be well received by the community. Recognizing that without Key West it would be virtually impossible to mount a credible effort, Hernández and Gómez accepted reality and reluctantly called an end to their activities. In a letter to Gómez, Hernández explained, "Confidence has given way to doubt, hope to disbelief, enthusiasm to silence, love to indifference, effective action to quiet disorganization; Somber silence!, that in these moments is the Key."<sup>41</sup>

Bleak as Hernández's description of Key West was at the moment, it in no way reflected a weakening of the community's resolve to support the struggle for Cuban independence. For almost two decades with tireless dedication the colony had funded the revolution when it could, and it offered its enthusiasm and patriotic zeal when money was not available. There had been periods of disillusionment and retraction before, but a resurgence in activity never failed to materialize after a healthy period of reflection and consolidation.

The flames and subsequent temporary loss of heart that brought the conspiracies to an end in 1886, ironically contributed to the birth of a new revolutionary center in the Tampa Bay area, that in time, produced a community as equally dedicated and patriotic as Key West. It could not have been otherwise since those who pioneered Ybor City carried with them the dreams and traditions of an insurgent population confident of eventual success. By 1888 the tobacco workers in the two communities were again spearheading the revolutionary organizing that culminated in José Martí's visit to Florida, laying the foundation for the final confrontation with Spain over the question of a free Cuba.

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40. *Cigar Makers' Official Journal*, January 1886, February 1887; Rivero Muñiz, "Los cubanos en Tampa," 24.

41. Hernández, *Maceo: Dos conferencias históricas*, 161-64.