

**/JOSE MARTI  
AND THE EMIGRE COLONY  
IN KEY WEST/**

Leadership and State Formation

*C. Neale Ronning*

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rehearsal for what would happen in Key West about a month later. The correspondent of New York's *El Porvenir* reported that 4,000 enthusiasts were at the station to see him off (Trujillo 1896: 74). It is worth noting that only a small group had met him upon his arrival--about 50, some have said. That, however, might have been due partly to the torrential rain and the late hour of his arrival (Carbonell 1952: 130; Mañach 1950: 270). But such minor adversities were not known to dampen the enthusiasm of Cuban patriots. Be that as it may, it is clear that his short stay in Tampa had generated great enthusiasm and had won many friends.

Martí returned to New York and we must return to Key West. We will need to see what that "Cuban city" was like in approximately 1890 in order to understand why it played such an important part in the emergence of Martí as the authoritative leader of Cuban independence.

### 3 Cuban Key West

With the dawn of that radiantly beautiful day, the passengers of that ancient wanderer of the sea, which brought the Cuban refugees, rustled up on deck shouting: The Key!

What happy moments for those poor Cubans who, like the other Puritans--those of Mayflower, came in search of the land of liberty. . . .

What joy; what immense happiness for everyone. I also wanted to see the Key. There, way in the distance, we could make it out like a tiny point. . . .

A bustling multitude waited on the pier, everyone trying to get to the front. They were the Cuban émigrés that were waiting for us, to embrace us like brothers.

That is the way in which Juan Pérez Rolo (1923: 8-9) recalled his boyhood arrival in Key West in 1869. He went on to become a tobacco worker, carpenter, cabinet maker, baker, journalist, author, revolutionary orator, and member of several patriotic clubs (Castellanos 1935: 144). Thousands of Cuban refugees duplicated his experiences.

Prior to 1868, there were only a few Cubans on the Key. Some of those had been involved in the Narciso López expedition of 1850 and could not return to their homeland. A few others were there for other reasons.

The first large influx of Cubans came during the Ten Years War (1868-78). Spanish persecution was the initial cause, but very quickly the development of a thriving cigar industry provided

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employment incentives for thousands of workers. Cubans were largely responsible for the rapid growth of that industry, both as workers and factory owners.

Estimates of the Cuban population on the island are conflicting and, obviously, only an approximation. Census figures, where available, are also open to question. Cubans frequently shifted their residence between Key West and Havana and, later, between Key West and Tampa. Many single individuals lived with families, and even the conscientious censustaker could not have accounted for them.

One source lists 9,890 Cubans in Key West at the end of the Ten Years War (Castellanos 1935: 227). Another lists some 8,000 cigar workers in 1873, five years after the beginning of the war (Westfall 1984: 23). Since most of the workers were Cubans and many had families the total number of Cubans would probably have reached at least Westfall's estimate. Yet another source lists only 5,500 Cubans in 1885 (Poyo 1983: 208).

The 1890 census showed a Key West population of 18,080 (Browne 1973: 173) and an estimate for 1893 gives a figure of 21,000 (Westfall 1984: 48). Cuban writers who lived in Key West at the time have insisted that Cubans made up a majority of the population. Since the Cuban population fluctuated so greatly, that assertion may or may not be consistent with another estimate that approximately one third of the Key West inhabitants throughout the final 30 years of the century were Cubans (Poyo 1983: 207-208). The same estimate gives about 7,000 Cubans for 1890, the peak year for the cigar industry.

A Cuban population of seven to ten thousand seems a reasonable estimate for the years 1891-94, the years that Martí was most active on the island. A contemporary of Martí estimated that there were about 25,000 Cuban exiles in all the United States at that time (Cruz 1895: 99). That would mean that approximately one-third of all Cubans in the United States were in Key West.

The Cuban population of Key West declined sharply in 1894 as a result of the strike of that year: 2,000 were said to have gone to Tampa in that year alone (Deulofeu 1905: 84). In spite of this, a resident of that time reported much later that there were still 12,000 Cubans in Key West in 1896 (Castellanos 1935: 155). That figure is difficult to accept for a time when others reported that "Key West became deserted" (Trujillo 1896: 80).

Whatever the numbers, Key West was the most important émigré center during the years with which we are concerned (Trujillo 1896: 80; Arnao 1900: 225). As we shall see, Martí frequently reminded Key West Cubans of this fact in his speeches and in his voluminous correspondence with many of them. But the size of the émigré colony was by no means the only consideration; many other attributes of that colony placed it in the forefront of revolutionary activity and made it of special importance to Martí.

In many ways Cubans formed their own community but were the principal contributors to the development and wealth of the larger community. The majority of the cigar workers were Cubans, and some of the large factories and many smaller ones were owned and operated by Cubans. Eduardo Gato (1), Teodoro Pérez, and Caytano Soria were among the most important. Gerardo Castellanos, one of the prominent veteran military leaders and the father of the Castellanos frequently cited here, operated a factory employing some 200 workers--a medium-sized factory (Castellanos 1935: 184). A few of the very large factories were the center of small "factory towns," or colonies on the periphery of the main city. A cluster of small houses built around the factory was serviced by shops, restaurants, and other needed establishments. The original part of the city, inhabited mainly by the Anglo Americans, was known to Cubans as Conco Táon (Conch Town, for the original residents who were known as Conchs). That, of course, was the location of most of the shops and other commercial establishments.

In 1871, a group of Cubans "desirous of having a place where they could meet to talk about Cuba and conspire for its liberty" founded the San Carlos Institute (Alpizar 1947: 23-24). This quickly became the center of Cuban culture and patriotism on the Key. It was held in such esteem and affection that Ann Street, the location of the first small building in which it was housed, was known among Cubans as "San Carlos Street" (Pérez 1923: 13). When Martí arrived, the San Carlos had been relocated on Duval Street where a more modern version still stands.

Cubans had their own doctors, pharmacists, morticians, and even a few of their own Protestant ministers; Reverendo Manuel Deulofeu Leonart, frequently cited here, was one of them. They had their own hotels; the Hotel Monroe on Whitehead and

Division (now Truman Avenue) streets was a famous place of conspiracy and refuge for exiled patriots. Cuban restaurants, coffee shops, bars, shops, clubs, club houses, and schools were everywhere. Community social life and patriotic events often took the forms of veladas (festivities at night) held in the San Carlos, in Cuban clubs, and even in private homes. Processions preceding or following these events were equally important.

Newspapers were an important part of Cuban life, and as soon as refugees came they began publishing their own. El Republicano, La Igualdad, El Patriota, El Yara, and El Pueblo were among them. In 1887 a bilingual version of The Equator appeared: The Equator-El Ecuador (Castellanos 1935: 213-24). Ramón Rivero, an anarchist labor leader whom we will meet again later, was the editor of the Spanish edition of that paper (Deulofeu 1905: 85; Castellanos 1935: 225). El Republicano was for a time edited by Federico de Armas, a prominent member of patriotic clubs and one who openly proclaimed socialist doctrines (Poyo 1985: 31). El Yara, edited by José Dolores Poyo, was opposed to the political propositions of anarchism, since they held that an independent Cuba with only a new ruling class would not benefit the workers. Thus, Poyo characterized them as pro-Spanish (Poyo 1985: 34-35). Labor activists in turn criticized El Yara and the traditional leaders for placing patriotic matters above social issues (Poyo 1983: 319).

Patriotic clubs were formed upon the arrival of the first refugees, and in the 30 years between 1869 and 1899, more than 80 clubs were formed (Castellanos 1935: 155). Clubs came and went, and most Cuban men were probably members of more than one club. There were also clubs for women, youth, and even children. Probably more patriotic clubs were established in Key West than in all the other refugee centers combined (Alpizar 1947: 41-45).

Cubans had their own musical band of some 25 members, which played an important part in patriotic activities. It met and serenaded visiting patriots, headed the frequent parades on patriotic days, and added color and excitement to meetings at which local orators practiced their art. La Libertad, as the band was called, was directed by no less than a veteran of the Ten Years War who was also a clarinetist of considerable talent. Veteran José Rogélio Castillo y Zúñiga (usually, Rogélio Castillo) was of Colombian nationality and also worked as a typographer

on Poyo's El Yara as well as a selector (escogedor) in a tobacco factory. He was a prominent member of the important Cuban Convention of which more will be said later. The band undoubtedly had a number of musicians of considerable talent, including Rafael Fit, who later played with the Havana Symphony Orchestra and gave private lessons in Havana (Castellanos 1935: 168-69).

The Key West émigré community was the most "Cuban" of any of the major refugee centers. In Tampa, a large number of Spanish and Italian workers gave that colony a more cosmopolitan atmosphere. A writer in El Porvenir in 1890 claimed that there were 5,000 Asturian tobacco workers in Tampa at that time (Poyo 1983: 320). In other colonies such as those in Mexico, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic, the Cubans were more assimilated into the host country. And in New York the Cubans were dispersed in clusters in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and other places. They were simply overwhelmed by the size of the host city.

That was not the case in Key West. Castellanos (1935: 143) maintains that in Key West, Spanish displaced English, even for work in public offices. The natives (Conchs) learned Spanish and the shops sought to offer the products that Cubans wanted. The lawyer or merchant who did not know Spanish could not make a living. During festivals, there were 100 Cuban flags for every one American flag. Those are undoubtedly exaggerations by one who fondly warmed to his topic, remembering the wonderful days of the past. But even taking that into account, Key West was much like a Cuban city, as many visitors at the time were quick to notice.

Four Cubans represented Monroe County in the Florida legislature, five Cubans served as justices of the peace in Key West, and at least one of them, Angel de Lono, became a county judge. Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, son of the late president of the Republic in Arms, was elected mayor of Key West in 1875. He delivered the annual Fourth of July speech in English in 1876 (Brown 1973: 118; Key of the Gulf, July 8, 1876).

By the mid-1880s, Cuban political activists in the United States and elsewhere recognized Key West as the most important center of rebel activity. It had replaced New York, which had been the center of rebel activity during the Ten Years War and for several years thereafter (Poyo 1983: 205; Castellanos 1935:

204). The economic prosperity based upon the cigar industry made it the best source of money for the revolutionary cause. But there were other reasons that were equally important.

The largest concentration of military veterans to be found in one place outside of Cuba was in Key West. Ibarra (1981: 58) has pointed out that the nucleus of the movement at that time was made up of 17 generals and various colonels of the Ten Years War. Serafin Sánchez, Carlos Roloff, Juan Ruz, Rogélio Castillo, Gerardo Castellanos, Fernando Figueredo, Rosendo García, and Emilio Aymerich were all influential generals, colonels, or comandantes who lived in Key West at one time or another. The proximity to Cuba was, of course, one reason why they chose Key West--to be ready at a moment's notice. Climate and life style in Key West were much preferred over those in New York. Communication with other émigré centers in Central America, the Caribbean, and southern United States was also an important consideration.

In 1885, General Gómez, by consensus the supreme military leader of the rebel movement, placed the central junta in the hands of the veteran leaders of Key West (Poyo 1983: 205). The fact that he had been unable to get the cooperation of Martí and others in New York no doubt influenced his decision. The decision was welcomed by the Key West leaders and prompted new efforts there to form a more centralized structure.

On September 20, 1884, the general called together the main political leaders who met in the cigar factory of Céspedes, Pérez, and Navarro. According to this account, that meeting marked the foundation of "the glorious Cuban Convention" (Alpizar 1947: 71). Another account places the Convention's foundation in 1888, at a mass meeting in San Carlos (Casasus 1953: 200). Castellanos (1923: 200), whose father was a prominent member, places its founding in December 1889 in the home of Emilio Aymerich, a war veteran who lived at 1317 Duval Street and operated a famous school for Cuban children. Finally, the convention secretary during its entire existence places its origins in 1891: "In the early days of 1891, on the initiative of the old émigré Gerardo Castellanos, a patriotic association was founded under the name 'Convention,' with a membership selected from among the oldest and most meritorious of the patriotic colony" (Figueredo 1916: 37).

The various dates and places that have been offered for the

Convention's formation are probably accounted for by a casual use of words such as "founding" or "origin." They also attest to the several years of effort that had gone into the process before Martí arrived on the scene. Furthermore, by that time Key West was virtually the only scene of any significant revolutionary activity (Mañach 1950: 221; Castellanos 1935: 252).

Each member of the Convention was obligated to organize at least one new club (Castellanos 1935: 166). They obviously took this obligation seriously, and that no doubt helps to account for the large number of clubs that were formed in the late 1880s and early 1890s. In these and other activities the name "Cuban Convention" was never to be used. Instead, club Luz de Yara was the name used publicly. Exactly what function this secrecy of names fulfilled is not clear. Most secret organizations are not very secret and it may well be that secrecy helped to assure the members themselves of the seriousness and importance of their undertaking.

It was a small organization, without any formal responsibility to the Cuban community of Key West or elsewhere. A sense of responsibility undoubtedly existed, however. Given its secrecy, there could be no community participation in elections or procedures for approval of its action. The organization was supposedly limited to 25 members (Alpizar 1947: 73; Poyo 1983: 287), although Castellanos (1935: 166-67) list the names of 46 members and in a later work reports that there were "some twenty-seven" (1944: 93). It appears that an informal relationship existed between some of the clubs and the Convention, especially those founded by Convention members. But this was a matter that would have to await Martí's organizational skills.

Even within the confines of its own organization, the structure was highly centralized. It placed much of its action in the hands of an executive committee of three. In addition to specific powers, such as the "execution of Convention agreements" and "those matters which the Convention declares of an excessively delicate nature," article 19 added "all exclusively revolutionary acts which are not in opposition or contradiction to the agreements of the Convention or those regulations" (Alpizar 1947: 77). The centralized character of the institution provided a precedent for the centralized organization which Martí put together shortly thereafter.



The Convention certainly marked the most advanced stage in revolutionary activity. Francisco Lamadriz, Key West's venerable patriarch, was elected president; José Dolores Poyo, editor of *El Yara*, was vice president; Fernando Figueredo, one of Key West's most influential military leaders, was secretary. These three veteran leaders made up the executive committee mentioned above. Several agencies or committees were established to carry out various kinds of conspiratorial activities: War, Treasury, Propaganda, and Correspondence. Probably the most important of these was the Committee for Correspondence headed by Poyo, General Serafín Sánchez, and Juan Calderón. They communicated with rebels in Cuba as well as with émigré leaders in Central America, the Caribbean and the United States. Three prominent entrepreneurs, of whom we will learn more later, were head of Treasury: Eduardo Gato, Carlos Recio and Caytano Soria. War, presumably in charge of planning military strategies for aiding rebels when war broke out, was under Figueredo, Sánchez, and Rogélio Castillo (the Colombian band director and veteran of the Ten Years War). Propaganda was headed by Poyo, Manuel P. Delgado (Poyo's son-in-law), and Gerardo Castellanos (Alpizar 1947: 71-79; Castellanos 1935: 165-67; Poyo 1985: 287-89). We will meet all of these Key West leaders again later in our discussion.

Although the Convention did have working-class members, none was included in the committees just described. Furthermore, membership did not include any of the prominent labor activists who played such an important part in the life of Key West at the time. During 1892 its membership included, among others, eight tobacco workers (two of them veterans) five merchants and shopkeepers, five cigar manufacturers, one lawyer, one journalist, three teachers, and one reader (Poyo 1983: 352). It was, then, reasonably representative of the community make-up. But the actual exercise of power was limited to only a few of the community's more prominent veterans.

Implicit in the convention's charter was a new strategy, a strategy that moved much closer to what Martí had been preaching for some time. Expeditions planned and launched from outside Cuba would no longer be the mode of operation as had been the case in the past. The revolt would have to be set off from within Cuba, and only after planning and propagandizing had made it likely that a revolt could be ignited in all parts of

the island simultaneously. Help would, of course, be forthcoming from the outside. Article 26 of the Convention's charter provided that "at no time or for any reason will the Convention urge or suggest an uprising to their counterparts within the island, limiting themselves in that respect to backing them up and providing assistance when they think it opportune" (Alpizar 1947: 78).

It is obvious from what has been said above that the process of forming a central revolutionary structure had been going on for a number of years in Key West and that it was well advanced by the time that Martí arrived in 1891. That made the Cuban Convention the more venerable to the small community of dedicated veteran leaders who had labored together during those years. It was part of a situation that would challenge Martí in his bid for leadership when he arrived in 1891.

But even as the veteran leaders of Key West were busy organizing and propagandizing, there were signs that not all was well within the revolutionary movement. By the time that Martí arrived in Key West, nearly a quarter of a century had elapsed since the opening of the Ten Years War. A new generation was emerging with new perspectives and new interests. Some of the veteran leaders were themselves well aware of this. In November 1890 Gómez wrote to Figueredo, saying that Cuba's future "is destined to be resolved by arms, but that is something which must be organized by new men and not by the military element, [which is] in my opinion very worn out" (Poyo 1983: 294).

The heroic, self-proclaimed leaders of countless sporadic uprisings, those proclaimed within Cuba or those that began with expeditions from outside the island, had been singularly unsuccessful. Time and time again, hopeful and optimistic generals had passed through Key West, proclaiming the final offensive that would liberate the country. They were the object of warm demonstrations of sympathy and support from the generous cigar workers and their employers. In this way, collections of five, ten and fifteen thousand dollars were made (Castellanos 1935: 204-5).

That strategy was becoming less and less promising, even as the revolutionary focus shifted to Key West, where the veterans were organized. The Gómez-Maceo plans of 1884-85, warmly received by Key West veterans, did not receive the financial support expected and required from the Key. Colonel Figueredo, among other things a popular Key West lecturer on the

Ten Years War, tried without success "to revive the émigrés who had lost their course" (Azcuay 1930: 45). Another of the veteran leaders who had been among the most active in trying to revive the spirit of the émigré, later recalled that "the revolution appeared to have expired" (Arnao 1900: 258).

If questions of strategy had reached a serious impasse, newer social questions were even more troubling. Time and prosperity were changing the political and social attitudes of Cubans in Key West. But there were other perhaps more important reasons. It had something to do with the type of émigrés that came to Key West as the successful cigar industry developed. In New York, the early center of revolutionary support, it was principally shopkeepers, professionals, and a few artisans who had established themselves. A few very wealthy Cubans had also gone there. In Key West and in Tampa, those who settled were fundamentally from the Cuban proletariat. In New York the majority were political émigrés; in Key West they came for economic reasons (Ibarra 1981: 140-42; Arnao 1900: 225; Castellanos 1935: 203).

Nevertheless, as one of the veterans pointed out, these workers "had proved to be an inexhaustible source of support for all expeditions" (Arnao 1900: 225). But by 1886, independence had not been achieved and workers' willingness to forego strikes and other forms of social militancy in order to ensure funds for expeditions seemed to be endangering the growth and cohesion of their labor organizations. Many workers even suspected that the Cuban entrepreneurs of the cigar industry had used self-serving arguments, in the name of Cuban independence, to discourage strikes (Poyo 1985: 30-31).

All had not been entirely peaceful, in spite of the workers' strong inclinations to support the independence movement. Castellanos (1935: 182) has referred to "the bitter struggle of 'selfish and raging bourgeoisie against the noble and always humiliated working class' (a phrase then current)." Indeed, Martí's arrival in 1891 had been preceded by more than a decade of strikes and other forms of protest. These events, of necessity covered only briefly here, have been carefully researched and ably analyzed by historians Gerard E. Poyo (1983, 1985, 1986) and L. Glenn Westfall (1977, 1984).

In 1875, the first cigar workers' strike in Key West was organized by Federico de Armas, editor of Key West's El

Republicano. He had been active in the Socialist International in Madrid prior to his arrival in the United States and openly proclaimed socialist doctrines in his Key West newspaper. In the last half of the 1880s, socialist organizers came to dominate the labor movement (Poyo 1985: 31), unions became larger, workers showed greater militancy, and strikes were more frequent.

Key West labor leaders communicated with their counterparts in Havana, and radical newspapers from both cities were read by the readers in the cigar factories. The reader (lector) in the cigar factory was a key factor in the development of social consciousness among the workers. He was engaged and paid for by the workers to read aloud to them while they were working. It was a distinctly Cuban innovation, provided to relieve the boredom of work. It obviously did much more than that. A wide range of newspapers was read in addition to many other works. Works on the struggle for liberty, the French Revolution, the campaigns of Garibaldi, and the books Don Quijote and Les Misérables were especially popular. There were said to be factories where Don Quijote was read ten times (Castellanos 1935: 182-83, 200).

In 1885 another serious strike took place. The attitude of the workers was conveyed in a broadside that was widely circulated throughout Key West: "Let us wage relentless war on those who have oppressed us and now show us no mercy. Let us employ the force of right, and if that does not avail, resort to the right of force" (Westfall 1984: 35).

In 1888 some 1,000 workers gathered in Key West's Jackson Square in support of striking workers in Havana. This enthusiastic demonstration prompted two anarchist organizers to come from Havana to lend support for additional organizing efforts in the Key. Obviously, independence was no longer the sole objective of many, perhaps most, in the émigré community as it had been during the Ten Years War and a few years thereafter.

In 1889-90 serious strikes occurred again in several Key West factories. Workers demanded payment according to the quality of the cigars they produced. The practice had been to pay the same price for each cigar made, regardless of the quality. The anarchists and other organizers had carefully planned this strike and did their work effectively. The workers organizations were so strong that by January 1890 the factory owners were



forced to accede to most of the demands of labor (Westfall 1984: 44-45).

It appeared that the anarchists' program for social reforms had replaced the workers' dedication to political altruism. Union newspapers in Key West and anarchist-socialist newspapers reflected the growing worker concern over social issues. Questions were raised concerning the meaning of independence. In 1889 El Productor, a Cuban paper, asked: "Is it that an independent fatherland consists in having its own government, in not depending on another nation . . . although its citizens are in the most degrading slavery?" (Poyo 1985: 33). About the same time, a Key West newspaper, El Cubano, carried a similar message: "All over the world, workers have served as cannon fodder in political revolutions; they have served as the human ladder on which the ambitious of all times have risen to power and riches" (Poyo 1985: 33). Another perspective was offered by Carlos Baliño, a journalist and labor leader in Key West: "I do not believe that slavery has been abolished . . . instead of domestic slavery for the blacks only, we have industrial slavery for blacks and whites" (Poyo 1985: 32).

Both socialists and anarchists argued that independence as it was conceived by the traditional leaders would only be the exchange of Spanish exploitation for exploitation by local Cuban capitalists and landowners. These leaders, veterans of the Key's Unión de Tabaqueros, first established in 1879, were the very people who came to dominate the labor movement in Key West and Tampa in the last half of the 1880s--Carlos Baliño, Guillermo Sorondo, Ramón Rivero, Oscar Martín, Eduardo Pajarín, and Martes Leal. They were supported by a number of like-minded or sympathetic journalists who helped to extend their influence (Poyo 1985: 31).

We refer to leaders from both Tampa and Key West because they so frequently shuttled between the two communities. The tri-weekly Olivetti (the steamship on which Martí arrived in 1891) made the journey in about six hours. It was reported to be "the fastest coastal steamship in the United States" until well after the turn of the century" (Browne 1973: 81; Key West Directory 1893). Many other ships provided more frequent if less rapid transportation. Some of the leaders also changed their place of residence from time to time. Ramón Rivero, for example, moved from Key West to Tampa. Néstor Carbonell, a socialist and

veteran of the Ten Years War, moved to Key West in 1889 where he wrote for El Pueblo. But his activities "disgusted more than a few in the locality" and he decided to leave for Tampa (Castellanos 1935: 122).

Some of the radical leaders charged the veteran leadership with plotting against the interest of the workers. The Key West correspondent for El Productor complained that

whenever a strike was called, the chieftains, through their newspapers, would begin a fund raising drive for this or that general, and this poor people when they were told of the fatherland's needs would not object and would return to work like tame lambs, with the strike lost, prices reduced and ready to empty their pockets into the hands of strangers. . . . These are their exploiters (Poyo 1985: 34).

As Poyo (1985: 34) has pointed out, the principal patriot leaders had always urged moderation but had never opposed labor organization among the cigar workers. But there was obviously a conflict of interest here. Strikes and disruption of production obviously meant less money for the revolutionary cause. And some of the civilian leaders, tobacco manufacturers, and merchants especially, had their own reasons to oppose strikes. Eduardo Gato explained his opposition to the 1890 strike:

The fathers of the strike are some forty or fifty restless creatures, never satisfied even if they were in paradise, and they have fomented discord. To please these unhappy spirits is impossible, for they are of a rambling nature, and they have infected the others, who are principally hard workers. These trouble breeders are principally bachelors, without the responsibility of family and home (Westfall 1984: 45).

Other cigar manufacturers and even merchants expressed similar sentiments. A decline in the cigar industry, of course, meant a serious decline in business throughout the community.

Gato was convinced that an alliance existed between the Spanish government and the anarchists. Mortal enemies though they were, the Spanish government was pleased with anything that

obstructed the independence movement, and the anarchists saw that same movement as at best a diversion from the real cause of the workers. Both parties offered assistance to workers who wanted to return to Cuba (Westfall 1984: 45).

Clearly there were serious problems for the independence movement in Key West. Flor Crombet, one of the generals of the Ten Years War, had come to Key West in April 1888 to try to rekindle the revolutionary fire in that most hopeful of émigré colonies, but he found it "in a state of complete demoralization" (Lizaso 1974: 200). Unity among the émigré colonies still eluded the veteran leaders. Within Cuba the situation was no better. "The great revolutionary leaders and caudillos appeared benumbed" (Castellanos 1935: 252). Whatever its local accomplishments might have been, the Cuban Convention remained essentially a Key West organization. In fact even its charter provided only that "the first duty of the convention will be to associate cordially with all interior or exterior elements of the island which aspire for independence" (Alpizar 1947: 78). There was still no such thing as a revolutionary organization that covered all the émigré colonies and Cuba. Indeed, there had not been anyone up to this time with the sophistication and leadership skills to unite conflicting elements within each community, much less the far-flung communities themselves.

The goal of independence under the leadership of the veterans had not been reached and its future looked unpromising. Workers' efforts to move toward social justice in their place of exile had not been very satisfactory either. They had organized and they had gone on strike, but, activists argued, their situation remained much the same. What was worse, "there was in fact little confidence that émigrés were capable of revolutionizing Cuba" (Poyo 1985: 34). The time and the place were ready for Martí. This is what Castellanos (1935: 260) had in mind when he observed that "the youth of Key West, avid for action, or as a reflex to the Tampa initiative, wanted to see in Martí the longed-for Messiah." Only eight years after Martí's arrival, Juan Arnao (1900: 258), veteran and patriarch of Key West, made a similar observation: "As all people of the world create their own idol, it was . . . Martí whom the Cubans worshiped, like the indians worshiped the sun."

Martí, better informed than other émigré leaders, observed and analyzed the relationship between the independence movement

and the social unrest in the Florida communities. The veteran leaders had seemingly ignored this or perhaps did not have the sophistication to understand it. These propositions are fundamental to understanding Martí's emergence as the leader of all émigré communities. His views on labor, racial, and strategic questions were known in Key West. We discuss the three aspects (labor, racial, strategic) of the problem together because they are so closely related and indeed were seen that way by Martí.

Shortly after his arrival in New York in 1880 Martí revealed his outrage over racism in a speech to the émigré communities there. "Man has no special right because he pertains to one race or another," he said. "Everything that divides mankind, everything that categorizes, separates or confines them is a sin against humanity" (Martí 1963, 4: 183). The speech was later printed in pamphlet form (as was the case with many of his speeches) and would almost certainly have been read by the readers in the cigar factories of Key West. His writings were also frequently published in New York's émigré newspapers, which circulated within all of the émigré colonies.

Prior to his Key West arrival in 1891 Martí had also corresponded with several members of that émigré colony on these and other matters of concern. He had met some of them in New York, either as residents there or when they were passing through on revolutionary or other business. José Dolores Poyo was known to Martí, as he was known almost everywhere because of his newspaper El Yara.

In October 1887 Martí wrote to Martín Morúa Delgado, a black labor leader and editor of Key West's El Pueblo. He wrote in response to a misleading letter that had been published in that paper concerning his views on social and other issues. "Profound is the pain," he said, "after [my] long years of modest labor to make impossible in Cuba the establishment of a government in which all elements and classes are not included under conditions of true liberty." It was, he emphasized, of special concern to him that the published misinformation not go unanswered in Key West, where "the émigrés have never allowed the fires on their altars to be extinguished" (Martí 1963, 1: 206-7).

In the midst of the strikes in the cigar factories in 1889 he wrote to Serafín Bello on November 16. Here he gave his views on social justice, workers rights, and racial equality. On the matter of the immediate issues of workers rights, he carefully

prefaced his remarks with the observation that these were local matters and would have to be settled locally. But if, as he had been told, the strike was the result of maltreatment of the workers and disdain for their rights, it was all the more serious: "My heart goes out to the workers like a brother." He related this to their struggle for independence: it would be necessary to understand the just demands of all social elements for anyone who wanted to study and understand the problems of Cuba. Finally:

The man of color has the right to be treated according to his qualities, without reference to his color. . . . The worker is not an inferior being, nor should he be isolated and governed by brute force, but rather by opening to him, in a brotherly way, the considerations and rights which assure peace and happiness among a people (Martí 1963, 1: 254-55).

Martí obviously recognized a kindred spirit in José Dolores Poyo, editor of Key West's El Yara. On November 29, 1887, he wrote: "In eight years of constant patriotic inquietude, never have I dared to ask for an exchange of views with those with whom I have most desired it, with the exemplary Cubans of Key West." Obviously having now taken the liberty to do so, he briefly summarized his position: "We must announce to the country and maintain with our own arts, a program worthy of attracting the attention of a people who are not about to follow the first one who, taking advantage of a saintly name, wishes to make himself its leader" (Martí 1963, 1: 212).

Social issues and strategy were clearly joined. Planning and organization for a concerted uprising throughout Cuba would have to replace the émigré expeditions of the past which expected a sudden outburst of revolutionary fervor when they landed. But planning and organization required a program that would attract the support of all Cubans. He wrote on these matters to the veteran leaders in Key West.

On October 20, 1887, he wrote to General Juan Ruz. Here he confined himself to strategy, but he included references that implied the need to confront social issues. Thus he referred to the émigré colonies who were tired of serving valiant figures, badly advised or guilty of ambition and apparently "incapable of

understanding or helping, at the opportune time, a movement that would be worthy because of the extent of its support and respect" (Martí 1963, 1: 200).

In December of 1887 he wrote to Juan Arnao, one of the patriarchs of the Key West community and of the independence struggle. Here he stressed the need for unity "within a democratic spirit and in a relationship of equality." Revolutionary sympathies must not be twisted or brought under control of any interest group for the domination of a social class or the unlimited authority of either a military or social group, or of one race over another (Martí 1963, 1: 214).

Martí's views on racial equality and social justice had been made quite clear, and they were certainly known in Key West (Poyo 1983: 319-49). That is certainly fundamental to an understanding of Martí's conquest of leadership and authority. But there are two other closely related circumstances that also must have attracted this generation to Martí.

Throughout Latin America a new generation was becoming more and more outraged by increasingly violent manifestations of doctrines of cultural and racial superiority in the United States. We will only note here that the nature and popularity of those doctrines were exemplified and summarized by a clergyman's admonition to his fellow North Americans in a best-selling book published in 1885: "Move down upon Mexico, down upon Central and South America, out upon the islands of the sea, over Africa and beyond. And can anyone doubt that the result of this competition will be the survival of the fittest" (Strong 1885: 159). An abundance of U.S. writing as well as U.S. policy itself made it clear that these were the prevailing views in the United States (LaFeber 1963: 62-101).

Martí was well known throughout the continent for his defense of Latin culture and civilization. His abundant writings on these subjects have been collected and published in many collections (Martí 1980: 1982). Cubans living in the United States who were constantly exposed to North American attitudes of racial superiority, especially black Cubans, must have shared the reaction of their generation throughout Latin America. It was less than five years after Martí's death that José Enrique Rodó's Ariel was hailed by the youth of Latin America as a defense of their civilization and a beacon of hope. It was also hailed as a condemnation of crass materialism in the United States, though

that was probably not Rodó's intention. Martí was both a precursor and contemporary of the great Rodó (1872-1916).

The second circumstance was simply the confusion and malaise that prevailed within even this most organized of émigré colonies. It was partly a consequence of the generational and other differences that divided the community. A resident of that time described the situation:

In 1891 I was an émigré of the most modest means in Key West when Martí's projects became known there. . . . In spite of the aspiration for independence, the émigrés were divided by classes and even by age and by provinces. The old people accused the youth of lack of courage, of our lukewarm love for our country, all of which prevented us from doing what they had done. Those from Camagüey scoffed at those from Havana for our lack of effort in '68 [the Ten Years War]. The factory owners, the escogedores [selectors] and the other tobacco workers looked at each other with distrust (Muñoz 1917: 344).

As already noted, it was indeed the situation described above that led another resident, though only a boy at the time, to conclude that "the youth of Key West . . . wanted to see in Martí the longed-for Messiah" (Castellanos 1935: 260). Or, as another contemporary put it, "he revived the dying and flickering spark in the soul of a generation that was tired and without faith" (Tejera n.d.: 129).

Of course, not everyone in Key West liked Martí's ideas. His disputes with Gómez were still remembered there. His call for a pluralist political organization based on democratic principles implied timidity and a return to the political problems of the Ten Years War. In the minds of some émigrés, he was associated with the middle-class colony of New York, with their talk of compromise and annexation to the United States.

Martí was no radical and he only expressed his sincere beliefs on social issues. Had he wanted to play the role of demagogue, he could have done so superbly. Reporting on Martí's performance in a literary and philosophical debate in Mexico in 1875 (Martí was then only 22 years of age), El Eco de

Ambos Mundos observed that "at a time of popular commotion, this young man will be a terrible thing in the public plaza" (Márquez 1965: 91). Yet, as we shall see in the next chapter, it was the workers with their support who provided the opportunity for Martí to demonstrate his abilities of leadership. It is remarkable, then, how little it took in the way of promises for the workers to offer him their support.

Certainly one reason the workers supported Martí, as Gerald Poyo (1983: 335) has observed, was that "the Cuban workers had never heard the patriot leadership express itself on social issues with such sympathy." And this was not the first time that Martí's appeal had touched the workers. While living in Mexico he represented the Chihuahua workers at a labor congress in January 1876 (Deulofeu 1905: 112; Lizaso 1974: 256) during the liberal government of Benito Juárez's successor. There, as in Key West, his sympathy on social issues obviously came through without resort to radical or extremist rhetoric. He was simply known as a friend of the workers. Workers and others as well were undoubtedly more impressed with what Martí's life represented, his ideas and his values, all of which came through in his writing and speeches, than they were in precise promises. They had undoubtedly heard promises before.

Martí obviously realized that too radical an appeal to workers would alienate other essential communities of support in the émigré colonies. There were soon problems in that respect in New York. As we shall see, he was forced to turn to affluent cigar manufacturers and merchants when party finances were in trouble. Unity of all émigré factions was absolutely essential. Yet one cannot follow Martí's leadership activities, and especially his communication with his constituencies, without a feeling that all of this was as much a matter of principle as it was of pragmatism.

The enthusiasm shown by workers in Key West and the other Florida émigré colonies was only the beginning. From that point onward it depended on his qualities of leadership. As we follow his interaction with the large and complex émigré colony in Key West, we will attempt to show in more detail what these qualities were and how Martí used them to take control of the Cuban independence movement.

Our arena of observation will be Key West, which in spite of everything and because of many factors still had to be the

center of rebel activity. Luis Lagomasino, a veteran leader who frequently passed through Key West, recalled that as 1890 drew to a close, only Key West remained as an outpost of revolutionary struggle (Deulofeu 1905: 112). Colonel Fernando Figueredo (1916: 42), a resident of Key West and among the most popular veteran military leaders there, also looked back on these eventful days in one of his many published works on the Cuban struggle: "Why? Why? did he [Martí] prefer Key West and select it as the base for his propaganda and organization? Ask why the sun rises in the east." He then goes on to give us a less enigmatic answer: "Because the legendary Key was already consecrated by the history of patriotism, as the cradle of our liberties, because all the caudillos had proclaimed it as the patriotic center of greatest power, through its example of union which it had always offered to exiled Cubans."

In spite of all difficulties, patriotic sentiment was beginning to be revived in some places as the decade of 1890 began. In Cuba it had become obvious even to conservatives that Spanish promises of reforms and autonomy were not forthcoming. It appeared to be the right time and Key West was the right place.

#### Note

1. Eduardo Hidalgo Gato, more correctly, Eduardo Hidalgo. Contemporaries, including Martí, used Eduardo Gato, or simply Gato. He and other Cubans probably resigned themselves to the inability of North Americans to understand the mystery of Spanish names. Accordingly, they sometimes used the last (the maternal) of their two family names. Gato will be used here for the sake of consistency. The same form will be used for other names where that was apparently the practice. Juan [Fernández] Ruz is another example of the practice.



## 4 The Triumphant Arrival of Martí

On December 23, 1891, accompanied by many members of the directorates of the "Ignacio Agramonte" club, the Patriotic League of Tampa and the Cuban Band of Ibor City, directed by Felipe Vázquez, the eminent Martí set foot on the secular rock of patriotism, the Mount Aventino of the Cuban spirit, which is called Key West. On the pier he was received by an immense multitude of émigrés . . . [with] Cuban and American banners and flags. A musical band accompanied the organization committee in order to receive Martí. The first ones to come forward and greet Martí were José Francisco Lamadrid [Lamadriz], President of the Cuban Convention; Genaro Hernández, representing the organizing committee and José Dolores Poyo. When the venerable patriarch and eminent patriot José F. Lamadrid approached Martí, the two embraced with tears in their eyes. At that moment Martí said: "I embrace the old revolution," and Lamadrid answered: "And I embrace the future revolution" (Deulofeu 1905: 152-53).

Martí's arrival in Key West was more than just another colorful event, although it certainly was that. After all, virtually every veteran hero had passed through the Key at one time or another and, as Castellanos observes, they had been the object of warm demonstrations of support and generous "metallic contributions." They included Crombet, Cisneros, Aguilera, Bernabé Varona, the Sanguilys, Leoncio Prado, Pío Rosado,

Antonio Zambrana, Hernández, Maceo, Gómez, the Agüeros, the Quesadas, Aldama, and others (Castellanos 1935: 204-5).

This demonstration was different, however. All observers agreed that the size and enthusiasm of the reception and the demonstrations on succeeding days surpassed anything seen before in the Key. More important than size and enthusiasm, however, was the very nature of the cause that brought the demonstrators to the pier at the foot of Duval Street.

This demonstration and reception was the first step in a transfer of power, and many of the participants caught up in this and other events that followed must have sensed as much. Whatever they might have sensed, their participation was a key element in a drama that was taking place in Key West in 1891-92. It was already a demonstration of Martí's leadership and power; more would follow. For these reasons I think it both essential and interesting to describe these transcendent events in more detail than might otherwise be warranted.

What follows, then, is in fact the description of a new process, one that had begun in Tampa a month earlier. It is a description of the way in which workers and others were participating in, indeed were the driving force behind, the transformation of leadership and the independence movement. Some of the participants were seasoned activists from the labor conflicts of the 1880s. These events, described below, show not only their dedication and determination but their understanding of the possibilities of public demonstrations as symbols of authority.

Martí's success in Tampa was the subject of much interest and discussion in Key West. A contingent of Key West Cubans had been on hand to hear and meet him in Tampa. The contingent included labor activists and others who brought back first-hand reports (Márquez 1965: 296; Mañach 1950: 271). Two people in Key West were especially active upon their return. José Dolores Poyo published a supplement to *El Yara* giving details of Martí's speech and praising the patriotic meetings. According to Néstor Carbonell (1916: 92-93), one of the organizers of the event in Tampa, Poyo himself attended at least one of the meetings and had obviously talked with Martí: "One memorable day in November 1891 . . . in the center of that large building . . . the tireless patriot José Dolores Poyo, who introduced Martí, was at the tribune . . . explaining that he came to offer the gratitude of his loyal friends, the sons of labor."



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