

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

Leadership and State Formation

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He soon learned of a serious problem that had resulted from his visit. Workers in one of the large factories declared a strike on the point that the rules of the house had not allowed Martí to speak there. He expressed his deep appreciation, respect and sympathy for "my fellow workingmen," but he asked them a favor:

I feel that I can ask of you a favor. Your action can harm, in a most unfavorable moment, the sacred cause, the American cause, I serve with the most respectful discretion. Your action comes to endanger the prospects of final peace, and settlement of deep sorrows, in this city. It is your duty to me, in simple justice, to remove all pretext to represent me as a disturber in this locality, or a man willing to procure further disquiet and enmity, regardless of the mortal sadness of a workless home. My love of country is with me the ardent love of justice, and of the welfare of men, and the art of advancing their body of rights without unnecessary or violent struggle against its enemies (Martí 1963, 3: 178).

In spite of all of Martí's efforts and his expressions of optimism, Key West would never be what it had been for the Cuban Revolutionary Party. Back in New York, he wrote to Poyo on July 7: "According to the lists that I see, not a dollar has come into the treasury from the Key. And according to the calculations, subscriptions were to be more than \$3,000. Your collection is indispensable" (Martí 1963, 3: 226). That same month he sent a letter to Fermín Valdéz Domínguez, a boyhood friend who had moved to Key West in April: "On Tuesday I am sending an intimate letter to the factories, for you to read [to them] with energy and love--or whatever may be appropriate in each factory. This has to go to the heart of the matter" (Martí 1963, 3: 223). One additional example among the many must suffice to emphasize the continuing problem. In November he wrote again to Poyo, this time asking him to try to raise funds for payment to General Sanguily, who was returning to Cuba as his agent: "I know that the council must not have an abundance . . . [but] I ask you again . . . that efforts be made to raise the

amount of the note so that the brave and beloved general may help me" (Martí 1963, 3: 382).

On a more specific level, it was necessary to keep the veteran leaders and his many supporters informed that, in spite of all that had happened, money was coming in and the concrete, day-to-day preparations were well under way. Volume 3 of his Obras completas, frequently cited here, records much of these careful communications, often in coded form. A summary cannot do justice to it, but a few examples will give an idea of the nature and scope of his efforts to inform.

On May 10, he wrote to Sánchez: "Here I am, bent over, writing to the entire island, to our leaders, to those who can help us have everything we strictly need within two months" (Martí 1963, 3: 165). On May 30, he wrote to an associate in New York, expressing his faith that funds were forthcoming: "I have seen it in that beautiful Key, when six hundred hearts at the Gato factory . . . greeted with tender madness this poor skinny man who had just asked them for another contribution, which they gave him" (Martí 1963, 3: 191). And for Ramón Rivero he had these words: "Now we are in a time of silent and decisive activity. Everything depends on those who lead" (Martí 1963, 3: 126). To a group of his loyal workers, all of whom we have met earlier in this story--García, Rivero, Pelaéz, Díaz, and Pompés: "I am going, and you are going with me. That is what I have promised, and thus it will be in our expeditionary organization--incredibly accelerated by favorable events" (Martí 1963, 3: 244).

On September 2, he could inform General Sánchez that "I think everything is ready. . . . I am preparing the ship and the arms" (Martí 1963, 3: 243). And on October 27 he informed Gato that "the final hour is here . . . the campaign for the liberty of Cuba." But that was a rousing introduction to yet another request for money. He urgently needed five thousand dollars (in the form of a "loan"), and he did not make it easy for Gato to refuse:

Ah my friend: with that [\$5,000] what tranquility! Without it what terrible agony. . . . Since I began this work of salvation I have been living like a dog, and I do not complain. . . . Will you give me those moments of glory and respite--perhaps the last in my life, or will you leave me alone in my pain and

responsibility . . . crawling and begging to save our country, begging in vain, licking the ground like a dog? I will do that if you like. I hope that I do not have to do it (Martí 1963, 3: 310-11).

Then he turned on a bit of what some might call flattery: "You love work, and you only see riches as the triumph of work. You know that I admire in you, with a certain brotherly fondness, the bravura with which you have made your mark among men." And, finally, there is a mixture of "business" and challenge: "Would you lend \$5,000 to a merchant and not to Cuba? Give me one more reason to take pride in a Cuban." Gato was known throughout Key West as an "easy touch" when it came to patriotic contributions (though he was otherwise known to be quite parsimonious) and that might explain the postscript to the letter: "Absolutely no one knows or will know of this letter" (Martí 1963, 3: 311-12).

Gato, as always, came up with the money, and on November 10 he received a letter of profuse thanks. Martí assured him that "I do not call everyone my brother; allow me to call you brother." And in December he wrote: "Would that you were not as rich as you are, so your friend could tell you how much he respects you" (Martí 1963, 3: 345, 444).

What follows is beyond the scope of this study, since the focus of much of the revolutionary activity now shifted to points outside Key West and, what is more important, Martí's style of leadership was already well established. His great accomplishment was that of inspiring, organizing, and uniting the Cuban émigré colonies for the invasion of Cuba. He had done more than that. He also labored to create the kind of citizen who would be the foundation for a new and better state and society. In recounting and analyzing his efforts in Key West we hope to have laid the foundation for a more systematic analysis of his style of leadership. That will be taken up in the next chapter.

If only to complete the odyssey of Martí for the reader who may be unfamiliar with the rest of the story, a brief account of some relevant events is in order. Those events will also serve as a point of reference for some of the analysis in the next chapter.

After much planning and feverish last-minute activity, the party's first expeditionary force was to leave for Cuba in January 1895. The heart of the expedition was to sail from Fernandina,

Florida--the so-called "Fernandina Plan." A measure of the movement's success under Martí may be had in the organization and size of the operation. Casasús (1953: 249-53) provides the best account.

Three ships with men, arms, and munitions would leave, supposedly carrying "workers" and "agricultural equipment" for a large agricultural operation to be developed in Central America. One ship with arms and munitions for 200 men would pick up Maceo and volunteers in Costa Rica. A second ship, also with arms and supplies, would go to Key West to pick up a contingent of more than 200 volunteers under the command of Sánchez and Roloff. The third ship would take Martí and other leaders to the Dominican Republic, where they would pick up Gómez with more than 300 additional men. The head of each expeditionary force carried \$2,000 to help convince public officials of the legitimacy of the undertaking.

Due to the negligence, or worse, of a Cuban collaborator, the expedition was discovered by U.S. authorities and prevented from leaving. At the request of the Spanish government, Martí's activities had been under observation by U.S. authorities for some time, and this was obviously one of those times in history that the U.S. chose to "honor its obligations under international law." Thanks to Horatio Rubens, Martí's lawyer friend, some of the supplies were rescued, but it was a serious setback for the independence movement.

Martí tried as best he could to put the pieces back together, and on January 31 he joined Gómez in the Dominican Republic. On April 1 he accompanied the general to Cuba, where uprisings were already in progress. Gómez had tried to convince Martí to return to New York in order to resume his vital leadership of the émigré communities, but he gave in to Martí's relentless arguments. Shortly after arriving in Cuba, Gómez conferred upon Martí the rank of major general. On May 19, Spanish forces surprised Gómez's troops and Martí, contrary to the general's prior orders, charged into the skirmish. His death under these circumstances has been convincingly attributed by a number of writers to a sacrificial suicidal objective, but equally convincing arguments have been offered to refute the interpretation (Gray 1962: 32-22).

## THE OPTIMIST

Juan Arnao (1900: 258) offers us a colorful summation of the style and impact of Martí's unflagging optimism:

The intrepid Delegate . . . continued more and more to fire the patriotic spirit in his oratorical displays, with phrases so touching that the people believed them as an article of faith. For the sake of history they must be included [here] as a dream--"the horse is saddled--everything is done--there is nothing else to do--the bride is ready--the wedding day is close at hand." . . . And since all people create their own idol, it was Martí whom the people worshiped as the Indians worshiped the sun.

Cubans had struggled so long and so many uprisings had failed since Narciso López made his first attempt more than 40 years earlier. Given the background of these years of fruitless sacrifice it was essential to point to light on the horizon. This was something that Martí could do better than almost anyone else. Yet, precisely in order to avoid a repetition of the past, patience and planning had to replace spontaneity and bravado. As early as 1882 he had told Gómez that "to wait is a manner of winning" (Martí 1963, 1: 168). Here was a contradiction, and Martí's response was obviously something of a contradiction.

Perhaps this sheds some light on the unauthorized and unsuccessful uprisings that took place in spite of efforts to prevent them. If everything was ready, was it not time to light the fuse? Was it not reasonable to expect that help would be forthcoming? It certainly sheds light on his insistence that he should join the 1895 expedition as an active participant following the disaster at Fernandina. Immediately after the events at Fernandina, he wrote to Poyo: "Do not fear for me. I know how to suffer and make a comeback. . . . We will be reborn. We are surrounded by more help and respect, and more faith, than ever. . . . Read these lines to Serafín [Sánchez]" (Martí 1963, 4: 15).

There was, however, a positive side to the constant expressions of optimism. Would the movement that had just begun have survived the difficult period from mid-1893 through much of 1894 without such expressions from one whose words, to

paraphrase Arano, were taken as an article of faith? "The prevailing poverty will end in time: I do not think it will obstruct us" (Martí 1963, 2: 357). That was what Martí told Sánchez on July 25, 1893. We have seen many other similar expressions of hope. But the explicit references were probably no more important than the many more indirect or subtle ones. Hardship, poverty, and sacrifice were helping to educate, mold, and test an afflicted community for the difficult task under way--the formation of a new society and a new state. That was indeed an expression of optimism, but it was also more than that. It was a form of education. Education was a necessary part of leadership.

## TO LEAD IS TO EDUCATE

Writing only four months after Martí's death, Manuel de la Cruz (1895: 95-100) tried to point out the essence of his leadership. Oratory, he emphasized, "does not accomplish these miracles." Above all, "he was in large measure the educator of his Cuban people, . . . with his logic and seductive persuasion."

The leadership of Martí focused on two broad aspects of education. The first and most obvious was the one that we usually associate with schools and other places of formal education. This involved the acquisition of knowledge and skills that would enable the individual to live a full, useful, and satisfying life. He frequently wrote about this and when he came to Key West he made a point of visiting Cuban schools in order to encourage and emphasize a sense of purpose.

It was a memorable day on the Key when Martí visited the school of Emilio Aymerich at 1317 Duval Street. The curriculum there had been influenced by a series of articles that Martí published in *La América*, advocating the substitution of the literary for the scientific spirit. In addition to some of the usual offerings, it included instruction in what would now be called manual arts, practical arts or vocational education. Martí participated in examinations at Aymerich's school, heard students give demonstrations of their proficiency in several fields, and he gave his usual discourse (described as "short"). For the students he emphasized the importance of what they were doing as preparation for a nation built on liberty, justice, and peace (Castellanos 1935: 123-24). Such was the sensation of this event

leaders. But they also served to confirm his own credentials: "Everything, Figueredo, I have given for my country, even the peace of my household" (Martí 1963, 1: 294). The final phrase requires some explanation. His wife and son remained in Cuba, except for a short visit to New York, and Martí blamed this unhappy state of affairs, in part at least, on the failure of his wife and her family to understand his commitment to Cuban independence and their unwillingness to make similar sacrifices.

Expressions of commitment and dedication often took on a biblical or religious character. When the party statutes had been approved and he was first elected delegate, he made this solemn commitment to Poyo: "I shall confirm it by completing and cleansing my life, if it is not already free, from all thought or fault which could hamper my absolute service to my country" (Martí 1963, 1: 404-5). That is not quite the image of the saint going into the desert to cleanse his soul, but it does have a similarity of style and purpose. What is remarkable is the extent to which his conviction of himself was conveyed to his followers. The workers' manifesto, announcing his first arrival in Key West, spoke of him as the one who, "sacrificing everything, rushes to wherever he is called . . . one so full of light, of faith and hope, whom we will actually see" (Deulofeu 1905: 151-52). Does not the final phrase, "whom we shall actually see," have a certain mystical quality to it, especially when read in the context of the entire manifesto?

Walter Lipmann, writing not about Martí but about leadership in general, has probably conveyed as best one can the meaning of Martí's right to lead. "Great works are not for the faint hearted who doubt themselves. Yet only with that humility which opens men's minds to wisdom, can greatness be understood" (Rossiter and Lare 1965: 78).

## MARTI AND HISTORY

Because of Martí's short life and even shorter period of active leadership (about three years), scholars have found it difficult to resist the temptation to project him into a future that might have been. Hugh Thomas (1971: 316-17), for example, concludes that "had he lived he would doubtless have been the first president of an independent Cuba, and it is impossible to believe that Cuban history would have been the same thereafter."

The analysis presented here would seem to confirm that conclusion. Troubling questions come to mind, however. Would his Krausian philosophy of the harmony of society have had the same appeal and application in the real life of an independent Cuba that it had among émigrés and other Cubans struggling against Spanish domination?

But why not evaluate him in terms of what was and what remains? "Great changes in the history of an organization or society generally result from the innovative effort of a few superior individuals" (Jennings 1960: 1). That would certainly apply to "what was" in the case of Martí. He was able to unite the far-flung émigré communities as no Cuban had ever been able to do until that time. That was a considerable feat in itself, and the extent of the Fernandina preparations certainly shows the material success of that unity. The abrupt end to the Fernandina expedition seems to be best explained by the lack of discretion (or possibly worse) of a trusted collaborator on the one hand and the unpredictable and often cynical attitude of the United States concerning its "obligations under international law."

There are many ways and conditions of uniting a people, however, and what stands out in any evaluation of Martí is the way in which it was accomplished--the ends and the means. In trying to instill in his people a sense of their own dignity and the nobility of their cause, he worked with conviction and passion to convince them that their attitudes and methods must never betray that noble cause. With one beautiful and simple phrase, he conveyed the message to Teodoro Pérez: "We are a new and good people, and we must show it in the campaign that we are undertaking" (Martí 1963, 1: 395). Above all, the leader must always exemplify the best in a people and a cause. That is what remains.

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