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2015

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Cubans and the Caribbean South: Race, Labor, and Cuban Identity in

Southern Florida, 1868-1928

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for

the degree Doctor of Philosophy in History

by

Andrew Gomez

2015

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Cubans and the Caribbean South: Race, Labor, and Cuban Identity in Southern Florida, 1868-

1928

by

Andrew Gomez

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Frank Tobias Higbie, Chair

This dissertation looks at the Cuban cigar making communities of Key West and Ybor City (in present-day Tampa) from 1868 to 1928. During this period, both cities represented two of largest Cuban exile centers and played critical roles in the Cuban independence movement and the Clear Havana cigar industry. I am charting how these communities wrestled with race, labor politics, and their own Cuban identity. Broadly speaking, my project makes contributions to the literature on Cuban history, Latino history, and transnational studies.

My narrative is broken into two chronological periods. The earlier period (1868-1898) looks at Southern Florida and Cuba as a permeable region where ideas, people, and goods flowed freely. I am showing how Southern Florida was constructed as an extension of Cuba and that workers were part of broader networks tied to Cuban nationalism and Caribbean radicalism. Borne out of Cuba's independence struggles, both communities created a political and literary atmosphere that argued for an egalitarian view of a new republic. Concurrently, workers began to

experiment with labor organizing. Cigar workers at first tried to reconcile the concepts of nationalism and working-class institutions, but there was considerable friction between the two ideas. Influenced by Spanish anarchism, many cigar workers began to identify the limits of Cuban nationalism and instead argued for a working-class internationalism.

The second period (1898-1928) examines how union busting and Jim Crow segregation greatly weakened the Cuban communities of Southern Florida. After the Cuban War of Independence, Cubans in Southern Florida built their most ambitious labor unions. However, manufacturers and city officials used intimidation and vigilantism to break up local unions. At the same time, I show how Jim Crow discrimination became a central facet of both communities. Mutual-aid societies, Cuban schools, and other cultural spaces became segregated. In the process, Cubans of color had to create their own institutions to support themselves. Black Cubans became ostracized during this period and were forced into communities with African Americans. Conversely, I explore how white Cubans used their race to better their positions in Florida society and become Cuban Americans.

The dissertation of Andrew Gomez is approved.

Lauren Derby

Stephen A Aron

Raul Fernandez

Frank Tobias Higbie, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2015

To my mother and father

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am an unlikely academic. Born and raised in a working-class family in Miami, the journey to becoming a historian has been a long and arduous one paved by a great deal of work and even more help. An innumerable list of people have helped me along the way in ways both large and small. In lieu of undertaking the futile task of creating an exhaustive list of acknowledgements, I will focus here on people who contributed directly to this project and try to thank everyone else personally in the coming months.

The members of my committee, Toby Higbie, Raul Fernandez, Robin Derby, and Steve Aron, have all been invaluable to my development as a scholar. They have been exceedingly kind with their time and were instrumental in broadening the scope and depth of this study. Toby, in particular, has guided me through my entire graduate education and has been an ideal mentor. His guidance and critiques have improved all of my work as a historian. Raul, similarly, has helped me with this project from an early stage and my research trips to Cuba would have been impossible without his help. More importantly, the UC-Cuba Initiative which he leads has given me and scores of other graduate students a space to test ideas and collaborate with like-minded scholars that write about Cuba from a wide variety of disciplinary perspectives. Robin was invaluable for helping me to contextualize this project within a broader Caribbean history and her comments and ideas are littered throughout this manuscript. Similarly, Steve's broad conception of borderlands history is very much present in this work. His advice throughout my graduate career has been critical for this project and my general trajectory as a historian.

I have also had many colleagues and other faculty mentors that have guided me through graduate school and several aspects of this project. Jorge Carlos Arias, Jessica Harris, Preeti

Sharma, Nickolas de Carlo, and Devin McCutchen have all been wonderful colleagues at UCLA. Our endless discussions, academic and otherwise, provided me with many of my best experiences in Los Angeles and I thank them dearly for their friendship. I would also like to thank Ellen Dubois, Salvador Acosta, and Dan Whitesell for their comments and suggestions on earlier iterations of this project. Ellen, who commented on the earliest version of this work, and Sal and Dan, who commented on the development of my last chapter, provided encouragement and incisive comments that greatly improved this manuscript.

A transnational study such as this one would have been unlikely without the financial and academic support of many institutions. This project was funded at various stages by several UCLA units—the Department of History, the Graduate Division’s Eugene-Cota Robles Fellowship, and the Latin American Institute were all critical to funding my research. Many other institutions also helped fund and facilitate my project. Grants from the Carey McWilliams Fund, the UC-Cuba Initiative, the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities and the academic sponsorship of Havana’s *Instituto de Historia de Cuba* helped me in countless ways. This project was also greatly aided by the work and devotion of the wonderful archivists at the University of South Florida’s Special Collections, the University of Florida’s Latin American and Caribbean Collection, the Monroe County Public Library’s Florida History Department, the *Archivo Nacional de Cuba*, and the *Biblioteca Nacional José Martí*. Andy Huse, Tom Hambright, Richard Phillips, Belkis Quesada and countless others made working in their archives a joy. Their love and dedication to the history of Florida and Cuba was infectious and propelled my long hours in their respective archives.

I also wish to thank those closest to me: my parents and Caroline. In thinking about my parents, I am reminded of Hamlin Garland’s description of his own parents’ “silent heroism.”

My mother and father have lived lives that may seem simple and unremarkable, but they are the most heroic people I know. They arrived to the United States poor and with an uncertain future but managed to raise three college-educated children and instilled in each of us their fundamental decency and restless work ethic. In regards to this project, I like to think that it began decades ago with my father's photographic memory of his native Cuba and his countless stories about the island he loved and was forced to leave decades ago. The stories contained in the following pages retrace many of his own steps and harken back to the first of many times that Cubans looked to Southern Florida for salvation and the promise of a new beginning. Lastly, I wish to thank Caroline. Her love and support has been vital to this project and my life in Los Angeles. Writing a dissertation is exhausting work and she has served as an editor, advisor, and kind ear throughout the writing process. Her patience, humor, and love have meant the world to me and made my years in Los Angeles a joy. I look forward to many new adventures together, especially now that I can file this pesky dissertation.

VITA

Andrew Gomez received his B.A. in History and his B.S. in Social Studies Education from Florida International University. He was awarded his M.A. and C.Phil. in History by the University of California, Los Angeles. He specializes in the history of Latinos in the United States and is broadly interested in transnationalism, social history, oral history, and digital humanities. As an oral historian, he has led a series on the Justice for Janitors Movement in Los Angeles in concert with UCLA's Center for Oral History Research. His article on the series, "An Oral History of the Justice for Janitors Movement: On Trauma, Central America, and the Undocumented," was published by *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information* 11, no. 1 (2015): 1-15. As a digital humanist, he has worked on several digital projects including a collaborative series of articles that were published on the Los Angeles Aqueduct Digital Platform. Starting in the fall of 2015, he will begin an appointment as the Andrew Mellon Post-Doctoral Fellow in Digital Humanities at the University of Puget Sound.

Introduction: The Early Cuban History of Florida

There remains one patch of land in the United States that is the property of the Cuban government. On the corner of 8th Ave. and 13th St. in Tampa's Ybor City district stands the *Parque Amigos de José Martí*. Dating back to the late-nineteenth century, the property was owned by various Cubans that relocated to Ybor City. Mercedes Carillo la Guardia and Manuel Quevedo Jaureguizar were the last couple to own the plot and in 1956 they donated it to the Cuban government in hope of converting the area into a shrine for José Martí. Two events then occurred in 1959: the government of Fulgencio Batista finished the park and Fidel Castro overthrew Batista to become the leader of Cuba. In the throes of the Cold War, the park was soon forgotten by the revolutionary government of Cuba. Since then, the local government of Tampa has maintained the park even though the deed in the Hillsborough County archives still lists the Cuban government as the sole owner. The park now serves as a public space and a site of considerable importance to Tampa's Cuban-American community.

The park itself is sparsely designed. The *Parque Amigos* consists of a life-sized statue of José Martí, a bust of Antonio Maceo, and a small informational plaque near the park's entrance. The memorials to Martí and Maceo are no surprise. Martí, the great Cuban poet and revolutionary is embraced by nearly all Cubans and revered as the father of Cuban liberty. Similarly, Maceo, the mixed-race “Bronze Titan” of the Cuban independence movement, underscores the multiracial history of the Cuban insurgency and Cuba in general. However, the plaque is the critical piece that explains why a Cuban park would exist in the middle of Tampa, Florida. An important Cuban family once lived on the *Parque's* plot of land. The plaque is titled “*La Casa de Pedroso 1893*” and notes:

“Paulina Pedroso was one of the great women patriots of Cuba. After an attempt on the life of José Martí, the Pedroso House became his refuge. Whenever Martí stayed here the flag of the budding Republic of Cuba fluttered outside. Evenings the Cubans formed groups outside the little house to watch the Apostle of Freedom through the windows. Martí's room remained lighted until late at night and at times in the silence, the scratching of his pen could be heard. An intruder would have found Ruperto, Paulina's husband, on guard duty.”

The plaque speaks to the two reasons for Ybor City's founding in 1886. The first is that Ybor City was largely populated by Cubans who were staunch supporters of Cuban independence. Paulina Pedroso, as a woman and a person of color, represented the militant wing of the Cuban independence movement that helped propagandize, supply, and fund the efforts of Cuba's war against Spain. The other reason for Ybor's founding is represented in Ruperto Pedroso. Ruperto was a cigar maker at the Emilio Pons factory in Ybor City. Ruperto represented one of thousands of Cuban cigar workers that transformed Ybor City from marshland to a bustling neighborhood that brought in millions of dollars in revenue every year.

An older Cuban monument that sheds more light on this story can be found 400 miles south. Duval Street is the major artery that cuts through the 2x4 mile island that is Key West. Downtown Duval is largely now a tourist trap that houses Ernest Hemingway's favorite bar (Sloppy Joe's), the 1920s era La Concha Hotel, and the street performers of Mallory Square. However, on 516 Duval Street, sticking out like a sore thumb, is a large two story baroque structure with a massive Cuban flag draping its upper edifice. The *Instituto San Carlos* was founded in 1871 by Cuban exiles. Thousands of Cubans fled to Key West following the outbreak of the Ten Years War (1868-1878) in Cuba. For the next three decades, the island was a hotbed of

revolutionary activity in support of Cuban independence. Here, too, Martí visited with regularity. He dubbed the island his “beloved Key” and spoke to the thousands of cigar workers that found a new home in Key West.¹ The *San Carlos* was the cultural center of Cuban Key West. It helped raise funds in its halls, hosted performers in its theater, and educated the multiracial Cuban population in its classrooms.

The *San Carlos* and the *Parque Amigos* are part of one story. Both are centered on the Cuban communities of Ybor City and Key West in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. During this period there were several different exile communities in Florida. However, Key West and Ybor City were far and away the two largest. By 1900, there were about 17,000 Cubans in both Key West and Ybor City. For much of this narrative’s chronology, these communities were markedly similar. They were part of a fluid region where ideas, materials, and people traveled freely. Backed by a lucrative cigar industry, Cubans in Key West and Ybor City negotiated a complex identity situated somewhere between Cuba and the United States. From these Floridian outposts, the stories of Cuban independence, labor radicalism, Jim Crow, and Cuban-American identity all played out. This narrative is an attempt to show how Cubans converted Key West and Ybor City into multiracial, working-class enclaves, and how the concord that prevailed in the nineteenth century was tarnished by anti-labor repression and Jim Crow segregation in the twentieth century.

My narrative is broken into two chronological periods. The first takes place from 1868-1898 and focuses on Cuban nationalism and working-class identity. As aforementioned, the

¹ José Martí, Esther Allen, and Roberto González Echevarría, *José Martí: Selected Writings* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 324.

ideals of Cuban independence were central to the inhabitants of Key West and Ybor City. The communities functioned as sites for military exiles, as centers of economic support, and as producers of war-time propaganda. They were critical in coordinating the efforts of the *Partido Revolucionario Cubano* and hosted nearly every major Cuban figure in the late nineteenth century. They were also tied to a broader émigré community. Key West and Ybor City were two of the many émigré communities in the United States that stretched out into areas like New Orleans and New York. As two of the largest exile centers, Key West and Ybor City played a pivotal role in this network and the direction of the Cuban independence movement.

Each exile community had its own identity and Key West and Ybor City's was rooted in its working-class population. As skilled cigarmakers and members of a multiracial industry, they produced a particular vision of Cuban independence that was egalitarian and inclusive of black Cubans. This position stood out in the 1860s and 1870s when the broader independence movement was composed of disparate groups which included many wealthy landowners who were more hesitant about the general direction of the insurgency. By the 1890s, the inclusion of black Cubans in the Cuban independence movement was a given—it was in Key West, and later in Ybor City, where these ideas were debated and where the rights of black Cubans were vigorously defended.

As an extension of their working-class identity, the cigarmakers of Key West and Ybor City also began to experiment with labor organizing. The earliest labor organizations in both cities were reflective of the nascent attempts to organize cigarmakers in Havana. The first worker's collectives in Havana were modest but began the process of articulating the demands of laborers. These early organizations believed that manufacturers and workers could work collaboratively to achieve the best balance between the needs of both manufacturers and

workers—these became known as reformist organizations. By the 1870s, these types of organizations were also found in Key West. By the 1880s, cigarmakers took a decidedly radical turn. Influenced by Spanish anarchism, cigarmakers in Havana and Southern Florida began to organize into labor groups that went into open conflict with manufacturers and began to posit that the relationship between workers and owners was fundamentally adversarial. By the time Ybor City was founded in 1885, this turn was even more pronounced. On the outskirts of Tampa, the cigar town consisted of Cubans, Spaniards, and Italians. Many of the Italians and Spaniards in Ybor City had already been radicalized in their native countries and brought the traditions of Mikhail Bakunin and other European radicals with them. The rise of radical labor groups proved problematic to the most ardent proponents of Cuban independence. Those that supported the Cuban insurgency charged workers with becoming distracted and led astray by ideas that would not serve the immediate needs of Cuban independence. From the perspective of many of the cigarmakers, the class problem was at the root of inequality and the independence movement would not solve the underlying causes of Cuba's more profound social and economic problems. These differences were temporarily settled with the help of José Martí but they also pointed to the future of worker's movements in Southern Florida.

The latter half of my narrative (1898-1928) delves into Ybor City and Key West after Cuban independence. As Louis A. Pérez has noted, Cubans underwent a transition from “exiles to immigrants” during this period.² Following the Cuban War of Independence, the cigarmakers of Key West and Ybor City formed their largest labor organizations and became dedicated to

² Louis A. Pérez, “Cubans in Tampa: From Exiles to Immigrants,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (1978): 129-140.

forming networks that organized all workers. The height of these efforts was represented by *La Resistencia*, a labor organization that eventually housed thousands of workers in Ybor City and served as the largest voluntary organization in Florida. After major victories, they became sternly challenged by both city officials and the American Federation of Labor (AFL). In the case of the former, city officials teamed with manufacturers to use legal and extralegal measures aimed at hampering the growth of labor unions in Southern Florida. Similarly, the Cigar Makers' International Union, an affiliate of the AFL, positioned itself as an alternative to *La Resistencia* and used the conflict as a way of gaining a foothold in the Clear Havana industry's factories. By 1901, *La Resistencia* was severely hampered, and the CMIU became the dominant labor organization in the state.

After the failures of radical labor, repression became widespread. During this period, there was a greater attempt by the American government to consolidate control and power over immigrant populations. Cuban communities in Southern Florida soon became the targets of vigilante action and xenophobia. In response to these attacks, the Cuban communities of Key West and Ybor City changed in profound ways—labor radicalism was sharply curbed, Cubans of color were ostracized from the communities, and white Cubans began to adopt the customs and identities of white Americans. Jim Crow segregation increasingly separated black and white Cubans in public spaces and private organizations. Workers continued to labor next to one another in factories, but they were separate in nearly all other facets in life. For black Cubans, they became forced to live alongside African Americans while white Cubans enjoyed the benefits of white citizenship and began their transition to identifying as Cuban Americans.

The bulk of the primary research for this project was completed at the University of South Florida's (USF) Special Collections and the Florida History Department at the Monroe

County Public Library in Key West. The University of South Florida possesses several collections that are essential to Ybor City's history. One collection that was of particular importance for this project was the Tony Pizzo Collection which is comprised of thousands of newspaper clippings, academic articles, and ephemera relating to the history of Ybor City. USF also houses the collections of the major ethnic societies in Ybor City's history. The collections of *La Union Marti-Maceo* and the *Circulo Cubano* were of particular importance and documented member lists, meeting minutes, financial documents, plays, and other documents relating to the history of both mutual-aid societies. The Florida History Department in Key West serves as an invaluable archive of Key West history. For this project, genealogical binders documenting the lives of prominent Cubans, newspaper clippings, local KKK records, and other unique items guided much of my research and narrative regarding Key West.

My research was also buttressed by archives in Gainesville and Havana. At the University of Florida, the P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History and the university's Latin American and Caribbean Collection were particularly helpful. Both archives provided invaluable resources produced in both Cuba and the United States that spoke to the transnational identities of Cubans. In Havana, the *Biblioteca Nacional José Martí* and the *Archivo Nacional de Cuba* were both consulted. The national library possessed many rare émigré publications including a nearly complete run of *La Revista de Cayo Hueso* in addition to many ephemeral articles of interest. The national archive was valuable for its collection of émigré publications and legal records during the period of the Cuban independence movement. In particular, the *Museo Nacional* collection at the national archive was invaluable for capturing the experiences of Cubans in the United States and their relationships with the Cuban insurgency.

Chapter 1 - Key West: A History of Filibuster, Revolution, and Independence

The history of nineteenth century Key West is primarily a history of Caribbean immigrants. Historically, the city had been shaped by Caribbean peoples of indigenous, African, and European heritage. Even before Cubans began arriving en masse, other Caribbeans had already shifted the economic and demographic landscape of the city in the nineteenth century. Bahamians, both of English and African origin, dominated the maritime industries of Key West. Shipwrecking, turtling, and sponging were some of the first industries that shaped Key West's economy and supported an immigrant population. By 1892, just under one third of Key West's population was black with the majority being of Bahamian origin. In general, an amalgam of Bahamians, African Americans, and Anglos dotted the island in the mid-nineteenth century. Although generally accepted, many of Key West's affluent Americans thought negatively of the newcomers. One Anglo resident of Key West, a native Southerner, noted in 1876 that "There has been a large immigration of colored persons from the Bahamas...and while the statistician may rejoice over the number thus added to the population, the philanthropist and moralist must be moved with compassion on witnessing the approaches of degradation and vice which are apparent."³ For the vast majority of the nineteenth century, Key West was a city that was nominally American but dominated by a Caribbean presence.

Chapter one details how Cubans became the next group of immigrants to reshape Key West in their own image. The chapter begins by chronicling the life of Narciso Lopez and his efforts to overthrow the Spanish government in Cuba. Using Key West as a revolutionary outpost, he launched several filibuster expeditions that ultimately resulted in his public execution in Cuba in 1851. Although he failed in his efforts to begin a widespread revolt, he became the

³ Walter C. Maloney, *A Sketch of the History of Key West* (Newark: Advertiser Printing House, 1876), 24.

first of many Cubans to use Key West as a means towards upending the Spanish. As dissatisfaction over Cuba's government continued to grow, a revolutionary insurgency began to form, culminating in the *Grito de Yara* and the Ten Years War in 1868. The elongated war led thousands of Cubans to relocate to the United States. Gerald Poyo has written about the vast network of Cuban communities that sprung up and down the eastern seaboard and the relationships that these communities shared with each other.⁴ This chapter looks to build on his work and document the unique nature of Key West's Cuban community. In particular, the chapter looks at the working-class identity of Key West's Cuban community and its particular vision of the Cuban independence movement that was more racially inclusive.

While limited by the 2x4 mile dimensions of the city, the area held a great deal of promise to both insurrectionists and manufacturers coming from Cuba. For supporters of Cuban independence, the island provided close proximity to Cuba to facilitate the transfer of arms, money, and people. Geographically, there was also a great deal of familiarity for workers. The flora, fauna, and general environment of Key West felt familiar for Cubans settling in Florida. For manufacturers, the island provided a financially sound alternative to producing cigars in Havana. In the late nineteenth century, the United States placed a tax on the importation of finished goods. Given that the United States was a major market for Cuban cigars, the tax was a nuisance for manufacturers that cut into their profits. Key West presented an alternative. There, manufacturers could import tobacco which was not subject to the tax, and simply produce the cigars in the United States. Manufacturers also had political reasons for leaving. Many of them

⁴ Gerald Eugene Poyo, *With All, and for the Good of All: The Emergence of Popular Nationalism in the Cuban Communities of the United States, 1848-1898* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989).

became the targets of the Spanish government and were regularly accused of conspiring to aid the insurgency. Indeed, several manufacturers became key financial backers of the independence movement. Leaving Cuba for Key West allowed them to continue their business and provide room for their political activities.

Almost immediately, the exiled Cubans of Key West thrust themselves into the independence movement. Cubans did this by providing funds for the Ten Years War and also becoming active in the independence movement's literary press. Cigar factories typically employed *dias de la patria* that required workers to submit one day's worth of pay towards the independence movement. Throughout the intermittent conflicts between Spanish forces and Cuban insurgents, émigré funds were critical towards supplying the war effort. The Clear Havana industry, lucrative and constantly expanding, provided a stable flow of money to workers that could then be donated to military efforts in Cuba. The Cubans of Key West were also readers of the many Cuban newspapers that were founded in the United States during the late nineteenth century. In addition to serving as contributors to newspapers housed in other émigré centers, the Cubans of Key West founded publications like *El Republicano* and *El Yara* that chronicled the Ten Years War and also kept Cubans connected throughout the United States. Spanish officials were well aware of these publications. By 1869, the mere possession of Key West's *El Republicano* became grounds for imprisonment.⁵ Battles between Spanish loyalists and Cuban revolutionaries played out in the regional press. In one of the most famous examples, Gonzalo Castañón, editor of Cuba's *La Voz de Cuba*, entered into a feud with Key West's Juan Maria Reyes of *El Republicano*. Castañón famously traveled to Key West in 1870 intending to confront

⁵ Unknown newspaper, August 28, 1869. *Museo Nacional* Collection at the Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Box 19.

El Republicano's editor to a duel. The duel never occurred but Castañón was murdered at his hotel, spawning an international scandal. This particular event illustrated how Key West was a central location for the Cuban independence movement and a persistent nuisance to Spanish authorities.

Within the Cuban independence movement, Key West's émigré community formulated a vision of Cuban independence that was considerably more radical when compared to other independence centers. The aforementioned Narciso Lopez, an enemy of Spain and an ardent supporter of slavery, is instrumental in showing how the original insurrectionists against Spain were still often members of elite society. This changed with the outbreak of the Ten Years War in 1868. The leadership behind the war was made up primarily of wealthy landowners but the coalition that generally supported the war was much more diverse—working-class Cubans were also supporters of the war and maintained a different vision of Cuban independence. Key West is an ideal setting to chart this development. There, workers were accustomed to the multiracial, collaborative cigar factories that dotted Havana. In Key West, they were able to articulate a vision of independence that was favorable to workers and was also open to the contributions of Cubans of color. Intellectuals like Diego Vicente Tejera and Martín Morúa Delgado spoke frequently about situating the independence movement in a broad context that would address these fundamental flaws and prejudices in Cuba.

The Cuban population fundamentally changed Key West—within a few years they became the dominant ethnic group and propelled the small island into becoming the largest city in Florida. This could be seen in the earliest historical accounts of Key West written by Walter

Maloney (1876) and Jefferson Browne (1912).⁶ Maloney was one of the wealthiest citizens of Key West and served as mayor from 1889-1891. His account was written eight years after the first wave of Cuban immigration and is reflective of the cautious welcome provided by Key West's Anglo population. His broad account attempted to outline the history of the island and the contemporary political, economic, and religious influences in the city. Maloney wrote about the “segar” industry in the city and also talked about the Cuban schools, patriotic institutions, and secret societies that began to cover the island. It was during this period that the Instituto San Carlos was founded and Key West began to establish itself as one of the most important Cuban centers in the United States. Browne’s overview of Cubans in Key West also pointed to the importance of Cubans in local politics. This was most obvious in the mayoral election of 1876 when Carlos Manuel de Cespedes was elected to represent Key West, but Cubans played a decisive role in local politics throughout the late nineteenth century. As Browne described, “The Democratic and Republican parties in Monroe county at that time were evenly divided, the Cubans holding the balance of power. A few of these were strong in their party allegiance, but the majority were more or less indifferent, and voted from considerations of friendship or racial pride.”⁷ Other texts written by Cuban academics have also stressed how Key West became a Cuban outpost that was only nominally American. One of the first examples of this scholarship was Gerardo Castellanos' *Motivos de Cayo Hueso*. He was born in Key West in 1879 and later moved to Havana after the Cuban War of Independence. Influenced by nationalist ideals, Castellanos and other Cuban writers approached Key West and Ybor City as mere extensions of

⁶ Maloney, *A Sketch of the History of Key West*; Jefferson Browne, *Key West: The Old and the New* (St. Augustine: The Record Company Printers and Publishers, 1912).

⁷ Browne, 118.

Cuba that helped explain the founding of the country. Writing about Key West during his childhood, he noted that “Spanish displaced English. Our schools taught Spanish. To attain public offices, Spanish would suffice. The natives learned our language. The stores sold what Cubans liked. On days of festivals, for every one hundred Cuban flags floated one Yankee one.”⁸

The chapter concludes with a discussion of working-class organizations in Key West. Joan Casanovas and Robert Alexander have both shown how cigarmaking spurred Cuba’s first labor organizations.⁹ As one of the only urban industries on the island, cigarmaking brought together a diverse range of skilled workers that began to organize in the middle of the nineteenth century. Both have shown how workers’ earliest efforts were modest—organizing typically occurred in mutual-aid societies and worker’s associations that looked to amicably resolve differences with manufacturers. By the 1880s, a more radical wave of organizing began to be propagated by workers. Characterized by labor leaders like Saturnino Martinez, the more radical workers in Havana favored a mold of organizing that embraced anarchism and was more willing to embrace the use of the strike as a weapon. Chapter one details how many of these same trends were reflected in Key West. Given the constant flow of information and workers between Havana and Key West, the labor movement in each city began to take the form a regional movement. Just as in Havana, a reformist style of organizing gave way to anarchist organizations in Key West by the 1880s. This activity culminated with a large general strike among cigarmakers

⁸ Gerardo Castellanos, *Motivos de Cayo Hueso: (Contribución a la Historia de las Emigraciones Revolucionarias Cubanas en los Estados Unidos)* (Havana: Ucar, García y Cia, 1935), 143.

⁹ Joan Casanovas, *Bread, or Bullets! Urban Labor and Spanish Colonialism in Cuba, 1850-1898* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998); Robert J. Alexander, *A History of Organized Labor in Cuba* (Westport: Praeger, 2002).

in 1885 that paralyzed the cigar industry. The strike hinted at Southern Florida's future of labor organizing and conflict between workers and manufacturers.

Chapter 2 – Between Movements: Labor Militancy and Revolutionary

Nationalism, 1886-1898

Following a series of labor battles, Vicente Ybor and other Key West manufacturers became interested in potentially relocating their Clear Havana operations. By 1885, a new cigar center, Ybor City, was founded on the outskirts of Tampa. The town held the promise of providing better connections to the American mainland while also creating an environment where workers were more malleable and less likely to engage in confrontations with manufacturers. The former was achieved, and Ybor City eventually became the largest Clear Havana center in the United States. However, the workers were far from malleable and several factors led to Ybor City's work force turning out to be more radical than Key West's. In addition to all of the labor activity, the 1890s also included the Cuban insurgency's final push towards independence. Chapter two is an analysis of how Cubans in Key West and Ybor City balanced their demands to the nascent labor movement in Southern Florida and the Cuban War of Independence. One half of this story involves the increasing efforts to radicalize cigar workers in both towns. Workers continued to organize in both cities and some of the most fruitful collaborations between Key West, Ybor City, and Havana occurred during this period. However, from the perspective of many Cubans, time spent on the labor movement was time diverted from the more immediate needs of Cuban independence. The chapter looks at how both of these ideas were advanced and ultimately clashed in the 1880s and 1890s.

Ethnically, Ybor City was both a continuation and departure from the Key West model. Cubans continued to dominate the region but Ybor City possessed a confluence of Cubans,

Italians, and Spaniards—combined, they became known as the “Latin” community of Ybor City. Given the persistent clashes between the Spanish crown and the Cuban insurgency, the relationship between Cubans and Spaniards in Ybor City presented various complications in the 1880s and 1890s. However, Cubans and Spaniards were more commonly drawn together by work and a shared class identity. During this period, both groups were deeply influenced by Spanish anarchism. Frank Fernandez’s work on the history of Cuban anarchism has shown that the island’s foray into radical politics was spearheaded by European trends in leftist politics, particularly from Spain which possessed Europe’s largest anarchist movement.¹⁰ Joan Casanovas’ work has also shown how Spanish workers then transplanted those ideas to Cuba which led to a growing radicalization of cigarworkers with operatives moving from a reformist style of organizing to a more aggressive activist style.¹¹ Because of the transnational cigar networks in the Caribbean, it was these same workers that found themselves in Key West and Ybor City. To add to this dynamic, Ybor City’s cigar factories also possessed a small population of Italians, primarily from Sicily. Influenced by a wave of nineteenth-century peasant revolts and labor activity, Ybor’s Italians fit in politically from the outset in Florida. Gary Mormino and George Pozzetta’s work has shown how the common experiences shared by Ybor’s Cubans, Spaniards, and Italians propelled much of the town’s labor militancy and led to its central place in the Caribbean labor movement.¹²

Another critical part of chapter two details the growing coordination between Key West,

¹⁰ Frank Fernandez, *Cuban Anarchism: The History of a Movement* (Tucson: See Sharp Press, 2001), 20.

¹¹ Casanovas, *Bread, or Bullets! Urban Labor and Spanish Colonialism in Cuba, 1850-1898*.

¹² Gary Ross Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their Latin Neighbors in Tampa, 1885-1985* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998).

Ybor City, and Havana. This transnational network allowed cigarmakers to leverage their collective strength and use their proximity as a weapon during strikes. During this period, labor activity was constant and workers devised various ways to help one another in moments of strife. Part of this cooperation was financial. A strike in one Clear Havana center generally meant that the other centers would cooperate and help provide funds to the striking workers. However, cigarmakers also used the constant movement and steamship stops as a way of assuaging the difficulties of being on strike. If a strike began in Key West, workers on the island knew they could travel to Ybor City or Havana and obtain short-term work and simply wait the strike out. Manufacturers during this period were still unorganized and their lack of coordination played into the hands of cigarmakers. Workers were able to win various strikes during this period and the cooperation of the three cigar centers were central to these victories.

Meanwhile, Cubans in Southern Florida also maintained a fervent interest in the Cuban independence movement. Following the failure of the Ten Years War and the Little War of 1879-1880, organizing around independence went through a lull. However, by the 1890s, there was renewed interest in a larger independence movement that would deal a crippling blow to the Spanish Empire. Once again, the Cuban communities of Southern Florida would be instrumental in funding and arming the revolution. Their renewed efforts produced an even more vibrant émigré network in the United States. Jose Rivero Muñoz and Oscar Roca have both written about the importance of these communities to the broader independence movement from a Cuban perspective, while Joan Steffy has chronicled how Ybor City situated itself as a revolutionary

center in the late nineteenth century.¹³ Central to this narrative was the creation of the *Partido Revolucionario Cubano* (PRC) which tied together all of the major émigré centers of the United States in a highly coordinated effort. Barbara Johnson's work has chronicled this particular part of Cuba's émigré history and has shown how active these centers were during the crucial years of the war.¹⁴

A critical point in chapter two is dissecting how these two impulses, revolutionary nationalism and an increasing working-class identity, clashed during the 1880s and 1890s. During the earlier period of Key West history, the two shared an uneasy tension. Workers were beginning to experiment in labor organizing and show a greater willingness to use the strike—this was evident from Key West's 1885 strike which spurred some manufacturers to move north. Nevertheless, it was concord and not conflict that characterized Key West's earlier period. A major reason for this was the needs of the Ten Years War and the general independence movement took precedence over other concerns. By the 1880s, this relationship was fundamentally altered as workers began to question whether the independence movement would bring true change or merely continue the systemic abuses and inequality that had already plagued Cuba. As workers in both Key West and Ybor City continued to organize, both experienced a wave of strike activity in the 1880s and 1890s that signaled that cigarmakers would not placate to

¹³ José Rivero Muñoz, "Los Cubanos en Tampa," *Revista Bimestre Cubana* 74 (January-June 1958); Oscar Roca, *Los Tabaqueros de Cayo Hueso*. Special Collections, University of South Florida. Tony Pizzo Collection, Box 50, Folder Key West; Joan Steffy, "The Cuban Immigrants of Tampa, Florida, 1886-1898" (Master's thesis, University of South Florida, 1975).

¹⁴ Barbara Johnson, "Origin of the Partido Revolucionario Cubano in Tampa; Marti and the Tobacco Workers" (Master's thesis, University of Florida, 1968).

the requests of manufacturers and leaders of the independence movement as they had done before. Gerald Poyo is one of the only authors that has alluded to this tension and pointed to how this conflict posed a serious problem to the future of the independence movement.¹⁵ Workers became entrenched and argued that only a workers' revolution could achieve real liberation. Meanwhile, supporters of the independence movement argued that labor unions and internationalism were impediments and illusions that would be useless without a free Cuba. The chapter then details how José Martí, the independence movement's ideological leader, played an instrumental role in bridging the gap between these two groups. His first task was to build a broad coalition that included workers and Cubans of color. Imagining a Cuba "for all, and for the good of all," he embraced a broad vision of a free Cuba that would be sensitive to the needs of the working class and black Cubans. He made dozens of visits to both Key West and Ybor City where he assured local cigarmakers that he shared their interest in a more equitable society that acknowledged the indispensable role of workers. C. Neale Ronning and Jose Rivero Muñiz have each looked at how Martí was indispensable in the popular imagination of Cubans in both Key West and Ybor City and was crucial towards ameliorating divisions in each city.¹⁶

The chapter concludes with a look at the War of Cuban Independence through the eyes of the cigarmakers of Southern Florida. On one level, the war had a profound influence on the Clear Havana industry. The supply of tobacco and labor during the war was unpredictable. The height of disorder came when General Valeriano Weyler imposed an embargo on all tobacco being exported to the United States. In a mad rush, manufacturers secured as much tobacco as possible

¹⁵ Poyo, 76-95.

¹⁶ C. Neale Ronning, *José Martí and the Emigré Colony in Key West: Leadership and State Formation* (New York: Praeger, 1990); Muñiz, "Los Cubanos en Tampa."

before the order became law. Additional disturbances were caused by the United States' military presence. By the time the United States joined the war, Key West and Ybor City were both being used as sites to process and deploy soldiers—these soldiers caused large spikes in the populations of both cities. Aside from the tribulations of the cigar industry, workers in Southern Florida were also deeply imbued in the conflict. Workers helped fund the war but also served in the military as soldiers. Looking at cases of Cuban Americans that were captured in Cuba, the end of the chapter briefly looks at the inherent brutality of the conflict. Aside from the losses related to combat, there were massive losses to Cuba's civilian population. John Lawrence Tone's recent work on the conflict underscores the disastrous consequences of Weyler's reconcentration policy that placed rural Cubans in captivity during the conflict as a way of controlling the flow of new insurgents.¹⁷ The Cuban insurgency ultimately won but at great cost and with Cuba's infrastructure greatly harmed. The chapter ends with an uncertain future. With the war over, many Cubans relocated to their native island in the hopes of transforming the new republic while a majority continued to reside in Southern Florida and now focused on establishing stable communities.

Chapter 3 – Radical Unionism and Vigilantism, 1898-1910

The mass exodus back to Cuba never quite came. In the years that followed independence, Cuba was still being rebuilt and the cigar industry remained volatile and unstable. Many cigarmakers made the practical decision to stay in Florida as Key West and Ybor City provided a stability that was increasingly untenable in Cuba. In the nineteenth century,

¹⁷ John Lawrence Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba, 1895-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

cigarmakers had one foot in the independence movement and the other towards local concerns and worker's rights. After 1898, cigarmakers redoubled their efforts towards labor organizing. Cubans in Southern Florida continued to build on the labor networks they established in the 1880s and 1890s and became a dominant presence in the region. Centered in Ybor City, Clear Havana cigarmakers founded the largest labor union in Florida and became an ardent opponent of local cigar manufacturers. It was during this period that workers were met by the fierce resistance of local manufacturers and city officials in both Key West and Ybor City. Business interests in both cities collaborated to provide a steady supply of strikebreaking labor from Havana and used vigilante tactics to intimidate workers and suppress the labor movement. In the process, the feverish labor activity that grew to define Southern Florida came to a halt in the face of violent reprisal, culminating with the last lynching in Tampa's history.

Ybor City became the center of the Caribbean cigar network after 1898. As aforementioned, Havana's hold on the industry was tenuous after 1898. Key West continued to be a major center of cigar activity but manufacturers continued to flock north. Key West's space was limited and opportunities for expansion and connections to the American mainland were better in Tampa. There, the largest iteration of Southern Florida's labor movement took hold. Formed almost immediately after Cuban independence, *La Resistencia* was a union designed to represent all workers in Ybor City. Led primarily by cigarmakers, the union organized working-class laborers of all professions and argued for a worker's movement that would produce a more just and equitable society. At its height, the union boasted 5,000 members. Durward Long was among the first to write about *La Resistencia* from a historical perspective. He chronicled the

brief history of the union and their many battles with manufacturers.¹⁸ On a more local level, much of what we know about La Resistencia was provided from *La Gaceta*, a tri-lingual Tampa newspaper that chronicled the history of the union in the 1950s.¹⁹

After a series of early victories, the union's efforts were fiercely resisted by local manufacturers in Ybor City. As Tampa's prized industry, stability was paramount. Manufacturers and local business interests banded together to mount a formal resistance against the union's advances. Manufacturers began working in coordination with one another to ensure that when one manufacturer was being targeted by workers, other factories would not seek to benefit by siphoning off their best workers. Similarly, local politicians and figures in law enforcement began forming Citizens Committees designed to serve as vigilante forces controlling the working-class population of Southern Florida. They used intimidation, violence, and forcible deportation as a means of dealing with intractable workers. Robert Ingalls' history of vigilantism in Tampa has shown how state-sanctioned violence became a key feature of Tampa's development.²⁰ With local law enforcement and the local press supporting them, the vigilantes were given free rein to violently suppress the labor movement in the Clear Havana industry. This was not uncommon during this period and spoke to the power of anti-radicalism and xenophobia in the early twentieth century. Many borderlands communities experienced similar clashes where ethnic minorities presented a problem for business interests—these generally took on a regional form that followed a similar pattern. In the late nineteenth century, the Chinese were targeted in

¹⁸ Durward Long, "'La Resistencia': Tampa's Immigrant Labor Union," *Labor History* 6, no. 3 (1965): 193-213.

¹⁹ *La Gaceta*, July 23, 1954.

²⁰ Robert P. Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes in the New South: Tampa, 1882-1936* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988).

the American West. They were characterized as undesirable residents and forced to move to other locations. In 1885 and 1886, Chinese workers in both Tacoma and Seattle were forcibly deported in a strategy that became known as the “Tacoma Method.”²¹ Similar strategies were later employed in other borderlands areas such as Colorado and Arizona. In Colorado, the multiethnic and multiracial coal miners of Ludlow were dealt with violence in the famed Ludlow Massacre of 1912.²² Similarly, miners in Bisbee, Arizona were forcibly deported for associations with the anarcho-syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World.²³ In Ybor City, and later in Key West, a similar alliance between businessmen, law enforcement, and deputized citizens led to the fracturing of the labor movement in Southern Florida.

The strikebreakers found a willing ally in the American Federation of Labor. The Cigarmakers’ International Union (CMIU), a subsidiary of the AFL, had been lobbying for years to get workers to join the American union. Their efforts were consistently rebuffed by the Clear Havana workers of Key West and Ybor City. The AFL mold of organizing continued to focus on a more elite style of unionism—their record with immigrants, women, and workers of color was poor. Focusing on bread and butter unionism, the AFL’s efforts were largely confined to wages and bargaining rights. Cuban cigarmakers, who situated the labor movement as a broader critique

²¹ Carlos A. Schwantes, “Protest in a Promised Land: Unemployment, Disinheritance, and the Origin of Labor Militancy in the Pacific Northwest, 1885-1886,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1982): 373-390.

²² Thomas Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America’s Deadliest Labor War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); George McGovern, *The Great Coalfield War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972).

²³ Katherine Benton-Cohen, *Borderline Americans: Racial Division and Labor War in the Arizona Borderlands* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); Eric Arnesen, *Encyclopedia of U.S. Labor and Working-Class History* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 155-156.

of the capitalist system, found the CMIU's methods ineffective. The vigilante battles of the early twentieth century meant opportunity for the CMIU. Situating themselves as the rational alternative to the radical laborers of the Clear Havana industry, the CMIU argued that they would build more sustainable relationships with manufacturers and represent the best of American-style unionism. There was certainly precedent for this development. The American labor movement frequently positioned itself in opposition to immigrant-run unions and workers. In the aforementioned example of Chinese workers in Washington, it was the Knights of Labor who helped spur outrage against the Chinese population in the Pacific Northwest. Similarly, the AFL had a long history of being critical of immigrant workers. In Florida, they mounted a similar tactic by dividing cigarmakers in Southern Florida and positing that they could do a better job of organizing workers. Indeed, they became the beneficiaries of vigilantism in the areas as their union rolls swelled following La Resistencia's collapse. Cuban workers continued to be restless under the CMIU. Chapter three chronicles several attempts to form a more radical alternative to the CMIU. The most comprehensive attempt was made in Key West where workers' efforts were promptly flattened by the same alliance of business interests and local law enforcement.

The last section of the chapter looks at the CMIU-led strike of 1910 in Ybor City. This was one of the largest organizing efforts undertaken by the CMIU and was geared towards improving many aspects of worker's lives. The underlying issue at stake in the strike was the establishment of union recognition in factories across Tampa. This became one of the most protracted battles in the history of the Clear Havana industry as it pitted workers against one another. Just as in 1901, workers from Cuba continued to be imported as strikebreakers. In addition, the lengthy nature of the strike left workers restless and in dire need of money. Violence was once again used to strike fear into local workers. The Strike of 1910 produced one of the

most violent episodes in the history of Southern Florida. Two Italian men, arrested in suspicion of the murder of a local bookkeeper in Ybor City, were taken from police custody, and lynched. The story produced an international scandal with the Italian consul irate over the flimsy investigation and general treatment of Italian workers in the United States. The lynching marked one of several instances of violence against Italians. More broadly, the lynching symbolized the end of radical efforts in Southern Florida. City officials and manufacturers were amenable to an immigrant work force, but not one that would preach anarchism and social unrest. The CMIU continued to organize in the aftermath but with little in the way of improvements to workplace democracy and worker's rights.

Chapter 4 - Jim Crow Florida and Becoming Cuban American, 1880s-1920s

The racial designation of Cubans in the United States was a complex amalgam of skin color, class, and context. As a constant mix of black and white, the Cuban cigarmakers of Florida did not fit neatly into the racial binary of the United States. During the majority of the late nineteenth century, this affected Cubans very little in their day-to-day lives. Boasting one of the most profitable industries in Florida, Cuban cigarmakers were largely left alone in their ethnic enclaves. The influx of Jim Crow legislation in Florida, beginning in the 1880s, caused a fundamental reorientation in the Cuban communities of Key West and Ybor City. Chapter four documents how Florida lawmakers first passed a series of changes to the state's constitution regarding marriage and cohabitation between black and white residents. Initially, it was unclear how these policies would change Cuban communities. Using the career of Judge James Dean as a case study, the chapter looks at individual cases regarding mixed-race Cuban couples to underscore the confusion behind how to define Cubans. These cases were rare in the late nineteenth century but in many ways pointed to the future of race relations in Southern Florida.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Cuban communities were separated in nearly every facet of life. Mutual aid societies, schools, and a range of public spaces were segregated for the first time. The schools, which had been among the first integrated schools in the United States, were of particular shock to the community. Jim Crow in this circumstance functioned as a modernizing force that brought Cubans into American society by using the country's racial policies. Cigarmakers continued to work together in the same factories, but their relationships were largely confined to the workplace. In several instances, violations of these racial mores could carry legal or violent consequences. By the 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan was a prevalent force in both Key West and Ybor City. Chapter four begins with the lynching of Manuel Cabeza who violated cohabitation laws by living with a black Cuban woman. The KKK in Tampa was equally active and regularly paraded through Ybor City in the 1920s as a way of intimidating residents. The KKK in both Tampa and Key West was largely composed of some of the town's most respected citizens which provided an aura of legitimacy to the organization's actions.

For black Cubans, the shift was unthinkable. Pressed into a segregated system, black Cubans organized into their own societies and projected an image of professional respectability. This was best shown by *La Union Marti-Maceo*, a mutual-aid society that served the needs of the black Cuban population in Ybor City. The group was critically important for preserving the history of black Cubans in Ybor City and for giving an organized voice to its members. *La Union Cubana* served a similar function in Key West. Both organizations were called on repeatedly to defend the reputation of black Cubans in Southern Florida. One example occurred in 1912 during Cuba's Little Race War. The war pitted the Partido Independiente de Color (PIC) against the newly installed Cuban government. The PIC represented a group of revolutionary black Cubans that did not necessarily represent the broader black Cuban population. Black Cubans were torn

on the issue of the war with most siding with the national government. In Florida, black Cubans were constantly harassed during this period and pressured to show that they were not serving as co-conspirators. During a public meeting in Key West, members of La Union Cubana were called on to provide lengthy defenses of individual members assumed to have been funneling money to the PIC.²⁴ The effort worked but spoke to the unique challenges posed to black Cubans. As one Marti-Maceo member recalled about this period, “Blacks don’t want you because you’re Cuban, and Cubans don’t want you because you’re black. You had to depend on your own.”²⁵

More complicated were the relationships between black Cubans and African Americans. Long separated by culture, religion, and language, Jim Crow segregation presented new realities that brought the two groups together. As Evelio Grillo has shown in his memoir of growing up as a black Cuban in Ybor City, these relationships were often adversarial at first.²⁶ Viewing each other as fundamentally different, conflict between the two groups were common, particularly among younger residents. However, over time, a shared reality brought the two groups together. Forced into the same schools, hospitals, trains, and parks, black Cubans and African Americans formed friendships, romantic relationships, and professional associations. Men like Grillo were among the first generation of black Cubans to have grown up with an experience that was partly shaped by his Cuban heritage but also the broader experience of being black in the United States. Two authors that have written about black Cubans in Florida during this period are Winston

²⁴ *Key West Morning Journal*, June 11, 1912.

²⁵ *St. Petersburg Times*, February 25, 1990.

²⁶ Evelio Grillo, *Black Cuban, Black American: A Memoir* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2000).

James and Susan Greenbaum.²⁷ James' overview of Afro-Caribbean radicalism in the United States situates the narrative of Ybor City as a success story gone wrong. He highlights the early alliances between white and black Cubans before exploring the divisions that arose after Cuban independence.

As Winston James has noted, putting the entire blame on Jim Crow negates the role of black and white Cubans as historical actors. Chapter four analyzes this point and begins to explore the underlying factors that caused white Cubans to accept the racial rift in the Cuban community. White Cubans used this period as a way of establishing themselves as Cuban Americans—this particular phrase is first seen during this period to highlight Cubans that were making a concerted effort to become Americanized. Working-class Cubans and wealthy Cubans were integrated in different ways. The wealthiest white Cubans, generally represented by cigar manufacturers, became ingratiated with the wealthy white population of Key West and Tampa by way of marriage, politics, and secret societies. The children of wealthy white Cubans, particularly daughters, were frequently married to prominent white Floridians. One of the best examples of this was D.B. McKay's marriage to Aurora Gutierrez, daughter of Gavino Gutierrez, one of the architects of Ybor City. McKay, a newspaper owner and mayor of Tampa, brought Gutierrez and many other prominent Cubans and Spaniards into the Democratic Party which essentially barred black participation during the Jim Crow era. These associations extended to secret societies such as the Elks and Masons where segregated lodges kept black Cubans separate from these influential associations.

²⁷ Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (London: Verso, 1999); Susan D. Greenbaum, *More than Black: Afro-Cubans in Tampa*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2002).

White working-class Cubans also benefited during this period. While they were occasionally the victims of discrimination, they had the economic and political might to counteract these slights. Generally, white Cubans were able to use their “in-between” racial status to maintain a cultural allegiance with Cuba while also maintaining the privileges of white citizenship that were not afforded to black Cubans. These privileges extended into the political, economic, and social spheres. The cigar factory was one of the only shared spaces that remained during the Jim Crow era. For the most part, white Cubans were notably silent about the treatment of black Cubans during the early twentieth century. One of the rare exceptions came in 1909 during a public debate over whether or not the Cuban government should support Cuban schools in Florida that embraced discriminatory practices. A representative of the Cuban government engaged in a debate with white Cubans in Florida over the morality of segregated schools in the United States. The Cuban official argued that state money should not go towards supporting racist institutions that would be illegal in Cuba. White Cubans, conversely, argued that Cubans needed to accept the realities of segregated Florida and the fact that the country had a fundamentally different value system.²⁸

The chapter concludes by considering the gulf between the ideals of the Cuban independence movement and Southern Florida’s Jim Crow discrimination. While racial equality was a central tenet of the Cuban independence movement, white Cubans in Florida were not willing to wage a similar battle in the Jim Crow South. Ada Ferrer has shown in her work on the Cuban independence movement that much of the prejudice that was present in the early Cuban

²⁸ *Diario de Tampa*, May 29, 1909; *Diario de Tampa*, June 2, 1909.

republic can be traced back to prejudice that was present among Cuba's freedom fighters.²⁹ The actions of white Cubans in Southern Florida point to the possibility that this was also the case in émigré communities. The relative peace of the nineteenth century was the exception to a longer history of oppressive and discriminatory practices.

Conclusion - From Radical Outposts to Tourist Attractions

The monograph's conclusion looks at the remnants of Cuban history in present-day Key West and Ybor City as a way of understanding the legacy of the Clear Havana industry in Southern Florida. Monuments, museums, landmarks, statues, and cultural institutions now commemorate the industry that built both cities. With nearly a century between the cigar industry's decline in the 1920s and the present, a variety of factors have shaped the public history of Cuban Florida. In the immediate wake of the cigar industry's collapse, many Cubans simply left Ybor City and Key West. Whether looking for cigar work in New York or relocating to suburban areas of Florida, the dense urban core that defined both Cuban enclaves was greatly weakened by the 1930s. Over the next several decades, many important Cuban institutions were struggling to stay afloat or were abandoned. In Key West, the Instituto San Carlos was vacant for decades. In the 1970s, the institute functioned primarily as a home for vagrants. In Ybor City, many important landmarks were simply bulldozed during the urban renewal efforts of the 1960s. It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that city officials and local Cubans began to preserve many of these institutions and landmarks. These memorials are presented from the viewpoint of cities that are now primarily driven by tourism and by a Cuban population that is considerably different

²⁹ Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

than the one that arrived on Florida's shores in the nineteenth century.

The collapse of the cigar industry was largely predicated on the rise of the cigarette and the subsequent decline in the cigar's popularity. By the 1920s, profit margins were slim and the introduction of cigarmaking machines decimated the work force in both Key West and Ybor City. Gradually, factories closed and cigarmakers either relocated or left the cigar trade altogether. Key West and Ybor City, tied together by the cigar industry for decades, began to take radically different trajectories. Key West had already begun its transition to a tourist destination by the early twentieth century. Henry Flagler, of Standard Oil fame, spent his final years and most of his fortune on the construction of the Florida East Coast Railway. The railway's route built much of South Florida, including Miami. By 1912, the railway provided a direct link to Key West, giving the island a vital connection to the American mainland. By the early 1920s, the luxury hotel became the new symbol of Key West as the island looked beyond its manufacturing history. Ybor City took a very different route. By the 1930s, white Cubans increasingly moved out of Ybor City, relocating to West Tampa or the many suburbs of Tampa. An increasing number of African Americans moved into the neighborhood and lived alongside the remaining black Cubans. Without access to the types of jobs that had previously been provided by the cigar industry, the neighborhood grew poor. By the 1960s, Ybor City became a prime candidate for urban renewal efforts and large swaths of the neighborhood were demolished. The new developments that were to take their place never followed.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, both Key West and Ybor City have become prosperous towns and each has attempted to preserve aspects of their Cuban history. In Key West, many of these efforts have been centered on the restoration of the Instituto San Carlos. In the 1980s, a group led by Rafael Peñalver, a Miami attorney, began to gather the support of

private citizens and state officials to preserve the San Carlos. After securing state funding and private donations, a restoration of the San Carlos was undertaken and the building was reopened in 1992 as a non-profit organization. The building's success was propelled by the support of many Cuban-Americans that fled Cuba following the 1959 Cuban Revolution. In the recent history of Southern Florida, it is this new wave of Cuban migration that has shaped both the present and the past. Events like the 1980 Mariel Boatlift and the 1994 Balsero Crisis, brought thousands of Cubans to Key West in desperate efforts to flee Cuba. Over a century after the Ten Years War, Cubans once again looked to Key West for salvation. Unsurprisingly, these stories have become part of the Cuban American narrative in the newly restored San Carlos. The institute's museum pairs exhibits on early Cuban Key West alongside exhibits on the balsero movement and more recent conflicts with Cuba. In Ybor City, the preservation of the town's Cuban history has been more thorough. After the neighborhood was declared a United States Historic Landmark District in 1974, many initiatives were put in place to preserve some of the older cultural institutions that remained. *El Circulo Cubano* became one of several mutual-aid societies in Tampa's Latin Quarter that were restored to their original condition. Soon after, many of the town's cigar factories were cleaned up and repurposed to serve as shopping centers, movie theaters, and even religious institutions. Replicas of the old rail cars that cigarmakers used to commute in were also made to allow tourists to move about the neighborhood. These public memorials and recreations of Ybor City's early history have become part of packaging the neighborhood as a unique tourist attraction and residential area.

In recent years, residents and activists have worked to create a more comprehensive public legacy of Southern Florida's history. While the initial efforts to preserve the Cuban history of Key West and Ybor City were important, they were also narrow in scope. Portrayals of Cuban

history in both cities tend to focus very little on women, black Cubans, and the racial legacy of Jim Crow in Cuban Florida. The conclusion of the monograph looks at many of the recent efforts that have been made by individuals and groups to draw attention to these important and often neglected stories. In Key West, a local attorney has worked to restore the judgeship of James Dean. Dean was the African American judge in Monroe County who was removed from office for granting a marriage license to a mixed-race Cuban couple. Similarly, a Miami high school teacher and his students have been working to draw attention to the life of Manuel Cabeza, a Key West resident who was lynched by the KKK for living with a black Cuban woman. Aside from investigating the case, the group is actively lobbying to attach a grave marker to Cabeza's tombstone that commemorates his life. In Ybor City, efforts to broaden the public history of Cuban Florida have been driven by the remaining members of La Union Marti-Maceo. In recent years, they have fought to be recognized by the state of Florida as a historical society.

In Key West, various individuals have worked to shed light on the island's Jim Crow history and the legacy of the KKK. Calvin Allen, a Key West attorney, worked to posthumously restore the judgeship of James Dean. Allen successfully lobbied to restore Dean's title and in 2002, Governor Jeb Bush restored Dean's judgeship and placed a portrait of Dean in Key West's courthouse. In Miami, a team of high school students led by teacher Michael Littman have worked to investigate the case of Manuel Cabeza, the Key West resident who was lynched for his relationship with a black Cuban woman. Littman and his students are currently working on securing a grave marker for Cabeza's gravesite that commemorates his life and military accomplishments as a World War I veteran. In Ybor City, similar attempts have been made to include black Cuban voices in the public history of the neighborhood. There, the members of La Union Marti-Maceo have been instrumental in securing the group's status as a historical society,

working with the city's mayor to declare a Marti-Maceo Day in 2007, and creating public monuments to the group's history. The bust of Antonio Maceo in the *Parque Amigos de José Martí* is the result of La Union's work. After years of cultivating a more public presence, their historical importance is being recognized in recent public projects. In 2013, a 12,000 square foot mural was commissioned in Ybor City to present the rich cultural history of Ybor City. Included in the mural are Antonio Maceo and Paulina Pedroso. The conclusion ends by looking at these efforts and discussing the recent controversy over the potential closing of Ybor City's last cigar factory.

Chapter 1: Key West: A History of Filibuster, Revolution, and Independence

Introduction

Narciso Lopez sailed for Cuba in 1850 with the intent of freeing the island from Spanish tyranny. Traveling on the *Creole* with 650 men, the ship proudly boasted a newly designed lone star flag. Created by Lopez and Miguel Teurbe Tolon, the flag became the symbol of Cuban revolutionaries for decades and has now served as the official flag of the Cuban republic for well over a century. The expedition's ambition was befitting of its architect. Lopez, Venezuelan born and from a wealthy Basque family, became a fixture of the Spanish military dating back to his teenage years. By the 1840's, he became swept up in the nascent Cuban independence movement and fled to the United States when the Spanish military began to imprison and execute insurrectionists. He found many sympathetic friends in the United States. James K. Polk, like several American presidents before him, had already attempted to purchase Cuba outright from Spain in 1848. Southern plantation owners coveted an additional slave state and Northern businessmen saw the economic possibilities of working closely with a newly independent Cuba. Lopez was able to secure financial backing from various American interests and attempted his coup with an amalgam of Cuban exiles, recent European immigrants, and Americans.¹

Lopez's filibuster was a fool's errand. He arrived in Cardenas and confidently proclaimed an independent Cuba. He envisioned that Cubans in the northern city would be swept up in the

¹ For more on Narciso Lopez, see Tom Chaffin, *Fatal Glory: Narciso López and the First Clandestine U.S. War Against Cuba* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996).

emotion of the movement and fight alongside his forces. Native Cubans did the exact opposite. Within hours, Lopez and his men were chased out of Cuba and fled towards Key West. Tailed by a Spanish warship, they safely arrived at the United States' southernmost point and disbanded. The filibuster became a national scandal back in the United States. Many Americans sympathized with Lopez's efforts, others followed the story amused by Lopez's quixotic folly, while others became alarmed by the clear violation of the United States' Neutrality Act. Political scandal soon followed and one of Lopez's primary backers, John Quitman, was forced to resign as Governor of Mississippi over his involvement. Lopez evaded legal charges and attempted another filibuster the following year. He was captured by Spanish forces and garroted in public for his efforts.

As errant as Lopez's attempts may have been, his efforts bore fruit in the ensuing decades. His escape to Key West became a symbolic exodus that would repeat itself for decades among fellow Cubans fleeing the Spanish Empire. Over the next fifty years, Key West became a key launching point for the Cuban independence movement and its war against Spain. The independence movement went through a myriad of changes during this period. It is instructive to note that Lopez began his efforts as a wealthy military man, a supporter of slavery, and a clear admirer of the United States. By the end of the century, Key West's independence movement was fueled by the working class, by Cuba's abolition movement, and by a poet who cautioned Cubans about the imperial ambitions of their northern neighbors. As the Cuban independence movement shifted through various iterations, Key West was frequently important to these developments.

Key West has always existed as a transient space. Whether under the control of Callusa Indians, Spain, Great Britain, or the United States, the island has been defined less by specific ethnic or national associations and more by the diversity of its inhabitants. Its geography is

central to this distinction. As the southernmost island in the Florida Keys, Key West is connected to both mainland Florida and the Caribbean by less than 100 miles. As a result, the island has long existed as a place where various cultures and characters have thrived. The city's history has been shaped and reshaped by Spanish explorers, Afro-Bahamian fishermen, Cuban revolutionaries, American industrialists, and a host of other groups. An 1881 article in the *Key West Democrat* jokingly noted that “A Key West lawyer is supposed to speak English, Spanish, Dutch, Choctaw, Seminole, Russian, Malay, fifteen African dialects, twenty Asiatic and as many more of the unwritten tongues...”²

Key West's proximity to Cuba has been especially central to the island's history. Located a mere 96 miles from Havana, Key West and Cuba have frequently interacted with one another. They have been connected through politics, business, migration, and revolution for centuries. Notable events such as the Cuban Revolution and the Spanish-American War serve as obvious examples of shared history but there have been a number of other events that have brought the two islands together. This particular chapter focuses on the first major settlement that Cubans made in Key West. From 1868 to 1885, they fashioned Key West in their own image and became a critical link in the United States' Cuban exile communities. During this period, two forces spurred this development: the Cuban cigar industry and Cuba's independence movement. Beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century, the United States government imposed a series of tariffs that made the importation of Cuban cigars markedly more expensive. Because the tariffs only applied to finished cigars, prominent manufacturers in Cuba realized it would be financially sound to import Cuban tobacco and hand roll the cigars in Florida factories—this became the basic blueprint for making “Clear Havana” cigars.

² *Key West Democrat*, June 8, 1881.

A parallel development that led to the boom in Key West's cigar industry was the elongated war between Cuba and Spain. Beginning in 1868, Cuban insurgents launched the first of three wars that would lead to Cuban independence in 1898. Due to perpetual unrest and the attacks on the cigar industry, many cigar manufacturers and workers began to relocate to the United States. Major émigré outposts could be found in Key West, New York City, and New Orleans with smaller Cuban communities also found in Jacksonville and Charleston. Gerald Poyo has written the most comprehensive overview of these communities during the era of Cuban Independence.³ While each community had its peculiarities, these Cuban outposts were largely connected by the independence movement's literary press and through members of the Cuban insurgency that would frequently visit the United States. This chapter will discuss in detail how Key West's location made it an ideal candidate to tie together émigré communities with the independence movement in Cuba.

Over the next several years, Key West would be transformed into an émigré community that was in many ways an extension of Cuba. Walter Maloney and Jefferson Browne were among the first to write about Cubans in their broad histories of Key West.⁴ Their works demonstrated how Cubans fundamentally altered the composition of the city's population and its local industries. As both authors articulated, the Cuban community in Key West was inextricably tied to the broader Cuban independence movement. This chapter will detail how Key West's Cubans were unique in their articulation of a future Cuba and were on the vanguard of the independence

³ Gerald Eugene Poyo, *With All, and for the Good of All: The Emergence of Popular Nationalism in the Cuban Communities of the United States, 1848-1898* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 89-90.

⁴ Walter C. Maloney, *A Sketch of the History of Key West* (Newark: Advertiser Printing House, 1876); Jefferson Browne, *Key West: The Old and the New* (St. Augustine: The Record Company Printers and Publishers, 1912).

movement. Cubans in Key West founded institutions that supported the Cuban insurgency, flowed freely between Cuba and Florida, and fashioned Key West in their own image. The independence movement produced many visions of a future Cuba and none were more radical than that of the urban cigar worker. The articulation of this future Cuba took center stage in Key West. The principles of egalitarianism, racial equality, and working-class intellectualism were all central to these developments. Cigar makers and cigar manufacturers worked hand in hand to create a booming cigar industry and a thriving independence movement. In the process, Key West became a Cuban colony and the site of some of the early revolution's most dramatic moments.

The First Domino: From Yara to Key West

On October 10th, 1868, Carlos Manuel de Cespedes planted Narciso Lopez's Cuban flag in Yara, a small town in Cuba's Granma province, and declared open rebellion on the Spanish Empire. Cespedes' proclamation came with much greater support than Lopez's. Decades of Spanish mismanagement led to wealthy landowners, the abolition movement, Cubans of color, and the urban working class to all consider revolution a viable option. In his famous *Grito de Yara* proclamation, Cespedes declared that he wished to work towards the eventual abolition of slavery, the creation of a free press, and a more transparent government free from Spanish corruption. By 1869, Cespedes and other leaders of the insurrection drafted a new Cuban constitution and declared themselves free from Spanish rule. These events triggered the Ten Years War between Cuba's independence movement and the Spanish crown. The Spanish government was brutal to insurrectionists and 12,000 Cubans found refuge in the United States

between 1875 and 1880.⁵ The creation of dozens of émigré communities soon followed with two major hubs in New York City and Key West. While New York City served as the intellectual center of the movement, Key West became the working class core of the émigré communities.

In the immediate aftermath, Key West became a critical site of reunion and reconciliation. For Cubans enduring the economic uncertainties and political violence levied by the Spanish, Key West became a safety valve. The Figueredo family serves as a typical example. Candelaria Figueredo and her family were major figures in the Cuban independence struggle. Candelaria's father, Pedro Figueredo y Cisneros (more commonly remembered as Perucho Figueredo) was one of the original architects of the Ten Years War and Candelaria herself, as a teenager, was the flag bearer during the Bayamo campaign. By 1871, following her capture by Spanish forces, she was forced to flee Cuba. In her autobiography, she remembered the experience of arriving in Key West and going through the bittersweet emotions of reunion and exile. She recalled arriving on December 11, 1871 and “finding myself in the arms of my poor mother after fourteen months of separation, which for me seemed like fourteen centuries. There we stayed and there I endured the cruel pain of seeing how the people closest to my heart were disappearing.”⁶

Key West also provided a respite for members of the working class looking to escape the economic troubles produced by the Ten Years War. For skilled cigar makers, Key West offered

⁵ Luz del Carmen Givès Fernández and Patricio Cardoso Ruíz, *Cubanía y Cubanidad: Debate en Torno a la Identidad Cubana: El Caso de los Cubanos en el Sur de la Florida* (Toluca: Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México, 2007), 58. Quoting Felix Lopez, *Emigración: Pronósticos del Tiempo* (Havana: Casa Editora Abril, 1998), 90.

⁶ Candelaria Figueredo, *La Abanderada de 1868, Candelaria Figueredo (Hija de Perucho)* (Havana: Comisión Patriótica "Pro Himna Nacional" a la Mujer Cubana, 1929), 31.

strong wages and a degree of stability that was impossible in war-torn Cuba. Antonio del Rio took a journey that would be repeated thousands of times by other laborers. On a whim, he decided he would travel to Key West in the hopes of eventually bringing his family with him. He boarded the Hutchinson steamer in the morning and was in Key West by the afternoon. As he learned from the Cuban migrant network, when he arrived, he declared that he was visiting as a tourist (the easiest way to enter the country as entering as contracted foreign labor was technically illegal). Soon after, he found himself in a local bar where the owner assured him that “This is a hospitable place and many Cubans live here that will receive you as a brother.” By chance, he soon met Proceso San Martin, the then-director of the *Instituto San Carlos*, who introduced him to Vicente Ybor. Ybor was the most prominent cigar manufacturer in the city and offered del Rio a job on the spot. Del Rio eventually moved to Ybor City, brought his family to Florida, and became a permanent Florida resident.⁷ The ease with which Cubans ingratiated themselves in Southern Florida simplified the transition process considerably. Migrating to a city like New York City meant finding a Cuban community within a large city made up of scores of ethnic groups. Conversely, Key West quickly became a city designed by Cubans for Cubans.

For Cubans like Figueredo and del Rio, Key West was part of the fractured community that defined Cuban identity. The experience of being exiled did not weaken their link to Cuba. Instead, Cuban identity became tied less to physical boundaries and more to the customs and outlook that one willfully adopted. As Fernando Ortiz has argued, “the real history of Cuba is the history of its transculturations.”⁸ The ideas that would propel much of the Cuban independence movement were the product of an exchange between revolutionaries in Cuba and the United

⁷ Emilio del Rio, *Yo Fui Uno de los Fundadores de Ybor City* (Tampa, 1972), 2-4.

⁸ Fernández and Ruíz, 35.

States. For many Cubans, Florida provided the opportunity to model the future Cuban republic and define the nature of Cuban identity.⁹ Close enough from Cuba to be familiar, and far enough to be free of Spanish rule, Key West provided the ideal location for building a Cuban community and also supporting military efforts against Spain.

Early on, Key West Cubans articulated a vision of Cuban independence that was rooted in activism and revolutionary support. Fernando Ortiz, the seminal Cuban anthropologist, often made the distinction between *Cubania* and *Cubanidad*. For him, cubanidad was borne out of happenstance. It was a type of Cuban identity that existed simply because someone was born in Cuba or had ties to Cuban culture. Cubania, conversely, was an active choice. Cubania was “a self-conscious, willed cubanidad, a feeling of deep and pervasive identification with things Cuban.”¹⁰ Cubans in Key West formed this distinction nearly a half century before Ortiz’s articulation. *El Republicano* served as the major Cuban newspaper in Key West. In 1870, *El Republicano* outlined that there are three classes of people who are frequently mistaken as Cuban patriots in Key West: those that fled because they simply feared a “stray bullet,” those that fled to avoid taking a side, and those émigrés that fled for better economic conditions. These categories belonged to Ortiz’s blanket concept of cubanidad. For Key West’s Cubans, true cubania necessitated an active belief tied to actions. As the paper argued, “The time has come then, to cease that unjustified confidence that is attached to every émigré from wherever; the time has

⁹ Louis A. Pérez, “Between Encounter and Experience: Florida in the Cuban Imagination,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 82, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 176.

¹⁰ Gustavo Pérez Firmat, *The Cuban Condition: Translation and Identity in Modern Cuban Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 30.

come to only give entrance in our acts...and not with indigestible palaver.”¹¹

This active definition of Cuban identity led to Key West’s militant reputation. As a movement in flux, Cuban independence was easier to articulate in terms of what it was against rather than what it was for. Essential questions over race, worker’s rights, and democracy were negotiated during the nineteenth century in communities like Key West. As an exemplar of moral, financial, and military support, the island was a model for a future Cuban republic. Because it was rooted in a working-class environment, Key West was more reflective of the broader Cuban population in terms of race and class when compared to other émigré communities. New York City, while certainly indispensable to the Cuban independence movement, was largely composed of the literary and cultural elite among Cuban émigrés. In this sense, Key West “was already a microcosm of a new and free Cuba that had been transplanted to the tiny island.”¹²

The Shooting and the Massacre

It did not take long for Key West to become directly embroiled in the Ten Years War. In the early stages of the war, Key West's local press was a central piece of the insurrection's propaganda campaign. The press was one of the most powerful tools for both the Spanish and the Cuban revolutionaries. The Cuban press in Key West, largely represented by *El Republicano*, was almost entirely dedicated to pointing out the brutality of the Spanish Volunteers and the purity of the Cuban cause. Spanish officials were well aware of the émigré press and went out of their way to rid all remnants of it from Cuba. An 1869 news report noted that “The secret police

¹¹ *El Republicano*, May 7, 1870.

¹² C. Neale Ronning, *José Martí and the Emigré Colony in Key West: Leadership and State Formation* (New York: Praeger, 1990), 3-4.

of the City Governor is extremely active. Persons found with such papers as *La Revolucion* of New York; *El Republicano*, of Key West, and *La Libertad* of New Orleans on their persons are considered as suspicious and unfriendly and consequently placed in security.”¹³ Reports like this speak to the cooperation among émigré communities—Key West and New Orleans were working-class outposts that were united by the Caribbean steamship routes that shuffled between the United States’ Gulf Coast and Cuba. New York City papers were commonly found in Southern émigré centers and finding them in Cuba spoke to the connections embedded in the Cuban émigré network. Spanish officials went to great lengths to control the local press as well as the influx of foreign papers. Arrest records during this period are riddled with arrests over the printing of materials that were viewed as slights to the Spanish Crown or other material viewed as inciting further rebellion.¹⁴

Tensions between the Cuban and the émigré press took a violent turn in 1870. Gonzalo Castañon was one of the most vociferous critics of the Cuban independence movement. As the editor of Havana's *La Voz de Cuba*, he frequently railed against the insurrection and branded them “a cowardly cause of wretches and traitors.”¹⁵ This type of rhetoric was to be expected from a Spanish supporter, but when he accused Cuban women of being prostitutes, Castañon became one of the most hated representatives of the Spanish crown. In response, Juan Maria Reyes, editor of *El Republicano*, entered into a public feud with Castañon. An exchange of letters

¹³ Unknown newspaper, August 28, 1869. *Museo Nacional* Collection at the Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Box 19.

¹⁴ See the *Asuntos Politicos* collection at the Archivo Nacional de Cuba. Spanish reports on “injurious” comments made against the state (typically in newspapers) are strewn throughout various boxes of the collection—these reports typically include original copies of the written offenses.

¹⁵ *El Republicano*, January 21, 1870.

culminated in January of 1870 by having Castañon wonder if Reyes “would be willing from close to repeat the insults and lies you have lavished from afar.”¹⁶

Castañon, accompanied by four other Spaniards, boarded the steamship *Alliance* and arrived in Key West on January 29th with the intent of killing Reyes in a duel. Castañon's journey was a suicide mission and he certainly suspected as much. In a hastily written letter to a friend on the day of his departure, he remarked that “In half an hour, I will leave Havana; you know where I am going. I don't have to tell you anything: I trust in your friendship, as you do in mine, and I know that if I do not return, you will be the father to my children.”¹⁷ As Jefferson Browne noted, “Key West at this time was a perfect hornet's nest of revolutionists, and Castañon knew that he took his life in his hands when he came here.”¹⁸ Rumbblings fluttered throughout Key West and Reyes eventually met with Castañon. Castañon asked Reyes if he was responsible for the offensive articles published in *El Republicano*. When Reyes confirmed that he was the author, Castañon threw the newspaper in Reyes' face and slapped him. A tussle ensued and both men were separated. Reyes never intended to enter into a duel with Castañon. Nevertheless, the damage was done. The news filled cigar factories and the endless plotting began. The insurrectionists were in the middle of a brutal war with the Spaniards and one of the mouthpieces for the crown had shown up in their town and assaulted one of the most respected *lectors*¹⁹ in the

¹⁶ Justo Zaragoza, *Las Insurrecciones en Cuba: Apuntes Para la Historia Politica de Esta Isla en el Presente Siglo* Vol 2. (Madrid, Manuel G. Hernandez, 1873), 818.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Jefferson Browne, *Key West: The Old and the New* (St. Augustine: The Record Company Printers and Publishers, 1912), 119.

¹⁹ The *lector* was the assigned “reader” in a cigar factory that would read to laborers while they worked on the rolling floor—this was a generally well paid and revered position.

city. Castañon knew he had to flee the next day but surely expected a tumultuous night in the interim.

Reyes may have refused Castañon's invitation for a violent confrontation, but Mateo Orozco, a local baker, was more than willing to oblige. Joined by Francisco and Jose Botello, Orozco was determined to kill Castañon and send a clear message to Spanish sympathizers. Castañon was staying at the Russell House, a Victorian style lodge which would later become the Jefferson Hotel. The three Cubans strode in and asked Henry Bryant to reach Castañon and tell him some Cubans wished to have a word with him. Castañon, strident as ever, came down dragging on a cigar. Orozco took a swing at Castañon almost immediately. Castañon, unperturbed, removed his cigar and replied with a blow to Orozco. At this point both men reached for their revolvers. Orozco pulled his gun out of his frock coat and delivered the first shot square at Castañon. The Cuban editor fell to his knees and Orozco fired several more rounds before running out of the home and sending Key West into a frenzy.²⁰

With the Ten Years War as the backdrop, Castañon's death was a scandal in both Cuba and the United States. On the American side, the story became national news. Accounts varied wildly with Castañon being portrayed as everything from a martyr to a Spanish lackey receiving his comeuppance. The American government responded by conducting their own investigation and ensuring that American citizens were safe in Cuba.²¹ In Cuba, the event was marred by mourning and immediately followed with renewed blood lust. On February 1st, the *Lavaca*, with

²⁰ *El Republicano*, February 12, 1870; *La Voz de Cuba*, January 31, 1870; *New York Times*, February 1, 1870.

²¹ Mr. Hall to Mr. Davis, "Struggle for Independence in the Island of Cuba," in *Documents Printed by Order of the House of Representatives During the Second Sessions of the Forty-First Congress, 1869-70*, (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1870), 189-191.

its flags at half mast, arrived in Havana carrying the remains of Castañon. Castañon's funeral was held the next day and was called the "largest of the kind ever seen in this city." Well over 10,000 mourners marched down the streets of Havana during a two hour procession.²² The response from the Spanish Volunteers was swift. In Havana, two men were immediately arrested on charges of sedition after news of Castañon's death became public—both men were shot and killed when they reportedly tried to escape. Other volunteers surrounded local prisons where revolutionaries were being held and demanded that they also be executed. In Matanzas, one such group of volunteers nearly started a riot. An American diplomat recorded that "Maddened by the refusal by the governor to give up the prisoners, they sent ten men to the jail to force a way in...The guards were turned out under arms and were ready to resist an entrance, which the rioters seemed determined to force, when the governor rode up with his staff and succeeded in allaying the excitement, sending the men back to the plaza." In the public discourse that ensued in Cuba, arguments over Castañon's death were frequent with many ending violently. Vicente Daumy, a horse dealer that worked in New York and New Orleans, was in Key West during the assassination. Recalling the murder while on Havana's Gervasio street, he claimed that Castañon "merited his fate." A Spanish Volunteer, within earshot, asked "Did he? In that case, you shall share the same." Daumy was taken out onto the street and shot twice in the head. Similar assassination attempts were made in Key West. Edward Botella, brother of the Botella brothers involved in Castañon's killing, was attending a fundraiser for the Ten Years War nearly two months after Castañon's death. While seated and in the middle of a conversation, a Spaniard ripped through the canvass that was just behind Botella and "a knife thrust through at the heart of Botella." Botella survived the attack, but the Spaniards were persistent. Days later, Placido

²² *New York Times*, February 2, 1870, February 3, 1870, February 12, 1870.

Ysquiendo was in Key West awaiting a steamship. He was assaulted and stabbed by two Spaniards and thrown into the water. He was able to eventually swim back to shore and recovered from his injuries.²³

The Castañon saga could have ended there but his grave site caused as much scandal as his shooting. The following year, a group of medical students at the University of Havana were wandering outside the university waiting for a professor. They soon walked into the nearby Espada Cemetery where Castañon's body was buried. Accounts have varied endlessly as to what happened next but the young men committed what they believed to be small acts of vandalism. The custodian of the cemetery, who silently watched the boys, thought otherwise. He reported the vandalism to Spanish authorities and claimed that the students had purposely vandalized the glass encasing surrounding Castañon's burial plot. The response from Spanish officials was swift. A court martial was soon convened and public opinion in Cuba was ruthless. Only four students were reported to have been in the cemetery, but eight were arrested for good measure. Spanish officials understood the powerful symbolism behind the case. Castañon had served as one of the most visible martyrs in a war that was still ongoing. As tension increased across the island, the basic facts of the case were rearranged. By the time of the trial, several journalists argued that the students had broken into the casket and tampered with Castañon's remains—an act that was later refuted by Castañon's own son.²⁴ An act of mercy may have softened Spanish Cuba's

²³ Mr. Hall to Mr. Davis, "Struggle for Independence in the Island of Cuba," 191-192; *New York Times*, February 1, 1870, February 2, 1870, February 3, 1870, February 12, 1870; *Cleveland Daily Herald*, April 7, 1870.

²⁴ Fermin Valdés-Domínguez and Consuelo E. Stebbins, *Tragedy in Havana November 27, 1871* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), xvii.

international reputation but within the island, “an acquittal meant a reign of terror.”²⁵ On November 26th, the decision was given to execute all eight students by firing squad. The following day, the eight students were brought out to thousands of screaming military men jeering the teenagers. Amid the howls, the students were lined up against a wall and killed by the ensuing volleys.

The story was an international scandal that only further entrenched each side of the Ten Years War. To supporters of the Spanish Crown, the students merited their death amid an island in revolt. For insurrectionists and their allies, the trial reeked of the very injustice and brutality that they felt characterized Spanish Cuba. For exile communities like Key West, the story became a rallying cry to organize—for Cubans, November 27th, became symbolic of the entire insurrection. As the *Key West Citizen* noted, “Every Cuban, wherever he may be, commemorates the anniversary of that day...”²⁶ A piece of the wall where the students were shot was preserved and later placed on the entrance of Key West's Instituto San Carlos. Even in the present-day, the anniversary of the shooting is a powerful reminder of Cuba's struggle for independence. In present-day Cuba, November 27th is still a day of mourning.

An Independence Movement for All

Cubans in Key West soon founded a multifaceted effort to become actively involved in the Cuban independence movement. To achieve these ends, Cubans focused on creating multiracial alliances, organizing committees for the independence movement, and a vibrant literary culture. It became impossible to divorce Key West's Cuban community from their

²⁵ *New York Times*, November 27, 1902.

²⁶ *Key West Citizen*, October 10, 1921.

independence struggles. Jefferson Browne wrote one of the first comprehensive histories of Key West in 1912. Thinking about the island in the nineteenth century, he noted that “A history of Key West which does not treat of the several revolutionary movements in Cuba, with which Key West was so closely connected, would fail in its purpose of faithfully portraying the events which have shaped or affected its destiny.”²⁷

Cubans in Key West had a vision of an independent Cuba that was more inclusive and egalitarian than the leadership of the Ten Years War. Because of its status as a working-class center, it produced a community that was racially diverse and more sensitive to issues of class. Cubans of color were present in nearly every Key West factory and were also some of the more notable revolutionaries in the city. Martin Morua Delgado is representative of many exiled Cubans in Southern Florida. Delgado was born in Matanzas, the son of a slave and a Spanish immigrant; at various times in his life he served as a writer, labor organizer, and Cuban senator. He arrived in Key West in 1880 and served as a cigar factory *lector* and journalist. While in Key West, Delgado frequently wrote against the tempered approach of the separatist movement on the matter of race. Writing for *El Separatista*, he noted that “Freedom does not allow for compromise. One cannot be half free, like one cannot be half enslaved.”²⁸ White Cubans like Diego Vicente Tejera echoed similar sentiments about the need to fully include Cubans of color. Writing on the damaging effects of Spain's racism and the future of Cuban education, he argued “Didn't we maintain a rancid preoccupation with caste, affirming that in society two types of individuals exist, those that are our equal and those that are inferior, and the first should be

²⁷ Browne, 115.

²⁸ Carolina Hospital and Jorge Cantera, *A Century of Cuban Writers in Florida: Selected Prose and Poetry* (Sarasota: Pineapple Press, 1996), 66.

treated with consideration and the latter disdain so as to keep them at a distance?...We should be educated to respect all our citizens, treating them all with equal consideration.”²⁹

No institution spoke to the multiracial ideals of the Cuban independence movement like the *Instituto San Carlos*. Founded in 1871, the Instituto became the vanguard of racial intermingling in the independence movement. Orators like the aforementioned Morua and Jose Dolores Poyo would frequently lecture in the hall on matters of “racism, women, education, and socialism.”³⁰ The San Carlos was a multipurpose venue with an emphasis on entertainment and education. In addition to the theater and lectures, the San Carlos also boasted one of the first interracial schools in the United States.

One of the most momentous nights of the San Carlos occurred in 1885 when Antonio Maceo and Dr. Eusebio Hernandez visited Key West. Hernandez was a soldier and physician in the independence movement. He trained and attempted filibusters in the United States, Jamaica, and Honduras. Natives of Key West remembered him for his contributions to *El Yara* and his visits throughout Florida to collect funds for the independence movement. Antonio Maceo was the second-in-command of the independence movement and universally revered by Cubans. The mixed race “Bronze Titan” was the ultimate symbol of a future Cuba. Landing on October 28th, both men spent the day visiting local cigar factories and meeting with the leadership of Key West’s independence movement. By night, they were both in the San Carlos lecturing to an overflowing audience. The night was dedicated to the understanding that black and white Cubans needed to work together to achieve true independence from Spain. In this context, no Cuban understood the need for Cuban independence more than the black Cuban. As one speaker noted,

²⁹ Ibid, 51.

³⁰ Hospital, 43.

“We who feel pride to belong to that noble race, victims of the cruelty and humiliation of Spanish tyranny, protest with all the fervor of offended dignity.” As the victims of slavery and perpetual marginalization, Cubans of color understood Spanish repression better than anyone. With this understood, the speeches also underscored the importance of uniting in common cause in the hopes that Cuban nationalism would supersede racial differences. The same speaker noted that “...we Cubans of color are part of one whole, named Cuba, and in virtue of it, before being a factor that benefited that infamous government that exploited and exploits with cruelty, we are and will be their most bitter enemies.”³¹

Patriotic clubs were the other major institution that allowed Cubans in Key West to articulate their vision of an independent Cuba. They were responsible for helping strategize, fund, and arm the revolutionary wars of the late nineteenth century. It was viewed as a moral obligation to take part in these groups, with women, manufacturers, and every other group expected to at least help the cause financially.³² Even during lulls in the independence movement, such as after the Treaty of Zanjón in 1878, the political clubs were essential to continuing revolutionary fervor and helping plot over a dozen filibuster expeditions. As the independence wars continued, dozens of the patriotic groups were founded in émigré communities across the United States. The increased coordination among these groups were essential to the funding of the insurgency. Fittingly, José Martí was in Key West when he formulated the idea for the *Partido Revolucionario de Cuba* (PRC). The PRC allowed for international coordination among the scores of Cuban independence groups—this coalition became one of the independence movement’s most forceful organizations.

³¹ *El Yara*, October 31, 1885.

³² Browne, 120.

Literary culture was also an essential aspect of Cuban Key West. Cubans in Key West received a barrage of literature through both formal (newspapers) and informal means (the *lector* in cigar factories). Both are central to showing the radical strains on the island. *El Republicano*, *El Yara*, and *La Revista de Cayo Hueso* served as the most important Spanish-language newspapers in Key West. All three were founded as tools for the independence movement and kept Cubans connected to activities on the island on matters of warfare and culture. *La Revista de Cayo Hueso* was particularly dedicated to showing the contributions of all Key West Cubans. Nearly every issue contained sections on patriotic clubs and their work and the *Revista* paid particular attention to clubs led by Cubans of color and women. *El Republicano* was another vital publication which was especially poignant on the intellectual and historical underpinnings of the revolution. While the Ten Years War raged on, *El Republicano* situated the independence movement in the broader context of indigenous revolts and other Latin American revolutions. In this context, the Spaniards were always dismissed as *negreros*, slave traders that wrought havoc in the New World. *El Republicano* often couched its criticisms in larger critiques of the Spanish leveled by indigenous people and figures like Bartolome de las Casas. One 1870 article implored Cubans to remember “those horrors that were shone with light by the evangelical charity of Father Las Casas. Suffice it to say that the indigenous population disappeared almost completely, vilely sacrificed by the ferocity of those that should have been their protectors.”³³ Along these same lines, Cuban revolutionaries frequently invoked the image of Hatuey, the Taino leader who was burned alive by Spanish forces in 1512. Carlos Manuel de Cespedes chose Yara as the starting point of the Ten Years War for this reason. These allusions presented some obvious contradictions. Like much of the early leadership of the independence movement, Cespedes was

³³ *El Republicano*, January 22, 1870.

a wealthy *criollo*. In many respects, much of the tension expressed during the Ten Years War was between wealthy criollos and Spanish *peninsulares* vying for political power. Nevertheless, the constant critiques of the Spanish slave trade and the historic abuses of the Spanish Empire were powerful messages that resonated with black Cubans and members of the working class in Key West. In addition to this political discourse, *El Republicano* also tied together the various émigré communities throughout the United States. Acknowledgements to New York and later Ybor City were obvious, but the newspaper also wrote about far flung communities like the one in Charleston, South Carolina.³⁴ For Cubans that were located in communities dominated by Anglo-Americans, newspapers like *El Republicano* served as an important bridge that connected the dozens of émigré communities in the United States.

In the workplace, the *lector* was responsible for the informal education of nearly every cigar worker. The lector was a skilled orator that read to cigar workers during the workday. The literature that was read comprised of a mixture of local newspapers (nearly always *El Republicano* or *El Yara*), socialist and anarchist texts, and classic works of fiction.³⁵ As several historians of Cuban cigars have noted, this had a transformative effect on racial relations. Cubans, black and white, were captive audiences for the lector. As Casanovas has noted on Cuban factories that preceded the Floridian industry, “The lectura also helped to blur divisions of race and status among workers. Since free and unfree laborers worked together in tobacco manufacturing, slaves, indentured Chinese, free blacks, apprentices, and dependientes became

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Susan S. Nelson, *The Transformation of Key West: The Cigar Workers of Cuba and the Built Environment, 1869-1930* (MA thesis, University of Boston, 1996), 40-46.

part of the audience.”³⁶ Both the content and nature of this literary dissemination spoke to an experiment in racial egalitarianism. The lector was part performer, part teacher, and part scholar. In 1874, a *New York Times* writer visited Key West and was most struck by the peculiar position of the lector. In thinking about the workers and their relation to the lector, he noted:

“This ‘reader’ is a most valuable and well-stored personage. He reads rapidly and loudly, first a newspaper and then a letter, and he is so well supplied with reading matter, either in print or manuscript, that he goes on all day without exhausting his material. He commences with the stock in his hat, then descends through the pockets of his coat, vest, and pantaloons. In this way the refugees are made to listen and work, whereas without a device of this kind they would lose much time in their animated debates.”³⁷

What eluded the *Times*’ writer is that the lector was not implemented by manufacturers to keep workers from chatting. The lector was an employee of the workers who was responsible for entertaining workers with classic pieces of literature and also keeping them up to date regarding developments in Cuba. The lector played an instrumental role in radicalizing workers by providing them with a constant sense of action regarding the Cuban independence movement. The readings of the lector were meant to stimulate workers so as to be treated not just as laborers but working-class intellectuals.

The Cigar Maker and Early Organizing

In addition to forming an independence movement, Cubans in Key West also formed a

³⁶ Joan Casanovas, *Bread, or Bullets! Urban Labor and Spanish Colonialism in Cuba, 1850-1898* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998), 85.

³⁷ *New York Times*, January 11, 1874.

stable community centered on the multi-million dollar cigar industry on the island. The cigar worker was the basic building block of Key West's émigré community. It was their labor that transformed Key West from an isolated community to an industrial hub. More than a skilled trade, cigar making was a culture unto itself. Cigar making was tied to working-class intellectualism, multiracial cooperation, and a fervent sense of professional independence. These customs were developed over time and began in earnest while in Cuba. The tobacco industry in Cuba was forever in the shadow of the country's most prized export, sugar. However, by the nineteenth century, the tobacco industry gradually opened up and became a boon to the Spanish empire. Over the next several decades, the industry was marked by repeated bouts of expansion and contraction as the Spanish attempted to control the burgeoning organizing of cigar workers. As an industry that was constantly controlled and restricted by the Spanish, it was unsurprising that cigar workers were particularly sympathetic to the idea of Cuban independence. With that said, the framers of the Cuban independence movement and Havana's working class had disparate visions of a future Cuba. The convergence of the cigar industry's nascent working-class culture and particular view of Cuban independence would receive their fullest expression in Key West.

There was a considerable gulf between many of the architects of the Ten Years War and urban supporters of Cuban independence. Led by Carlos Céspedes, the movement was generally led by wealthy creoles who had grown wary of Spanish abuses and the *peninsular* domination of wealth. On the matter of race, their efforts were tempered. Céspedes envisioned an eventual abolition of slavery but not an immediate one.³⁸ However, separatist sympathies were present

³⁸ Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 23.

throughout the island and did not maintain a single vision. The revolution began in the rural areas of the east but a separatist impulse was readily present in the urban centers of the west. In Havana, artisans and a multiracial workforce were particularly devoted to the cause of independence. However, urban areas were the least likely to form a cogent independence movement. The efforts of the Spanish Volunteers' Institute (*Instituto de Voluntarios*) all but assured that urban workers would be kept docile. The Spanish government demanded that *peninsulares* join the Volunteers who ruthlessly employed vigilante tactics to quell the uprising of 1868. By the end of 1868, there were 35,000 Volunteer troops on the island with nearly a third stationed in Havana.³⁹

No industry was more representative of urban Havana than the cigar industry. From its outset, the manufacture of Cuban cigars was controversial. Until 1817, the manufacture of cigars in Cuba was illegal—until that point, all raw tobacco was required to be sent to Spain for processing. Following the lifting of the ban, the cigar industry in Havana flourished. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Cubans cigars became revered as some of the finest cigars in the world. Spanish officials needed to balance this new-found wealth with some degree of concern. Cigar work, by its nature, is collaborative. In particular, Havana's cigar factories were nearly always multiracial. The Cuban cigar industry that was formed in the early nineteenth century was strongly condensed in Havana and from the beginning possessed a multiracial workforce composed of free and unfree laborers. An analysis of Havana's factories in the 1830's revealed that out of 2,234 cigar workers, 1,622 were free laborers while 612 were slaves. By the 1840's, slave labor disappeared from cigar factories but free workers of color still made up

³⁹ Casanovas, 98.

nearly one third of cigar workers.⁴⁰ For the Spanish crown, who preferred tight control over the island, this presented a number of problems. With slavery still legal in Cuba, and fears of a Haitian Revolution always present, the idea of an unrestrained social space shared by black and white workers was cause for alarm. This became complicated by the rapid success of the cigar industry. As Jean Stubbs argued, tobacco became Cuba's "second most valuable agricultural product and only large-scale industry...Precisely because of this, unrest in the tobacco sector was a very serious affair."⁴¹

The amalgam of cigar workers in Havana led to the creation of a working class community and the country's earliest forays into labor organizations. The beginning of working-class organizations can be traced back to the first mutual-aid societies of the 1850's. These organizations were largely designed to provide health care and other essential services to cigar workers. These groups were limited in scope. The first mutual-aid societies only allowed white membership and did not greatly deviate from many of the *gremios* and other mutual-aid societies in Spain. However, as Robert Alexander has argued in his history of Cuban working-class movements, "there began to appear in some artisans' societies and those of mutual benefit, the purpose of defending the group. This was not yet expressed in a militant form or too explicitly, but the fact that some of these societies were in fact transforming themselves in practice into resistance societies pointed to another form of evolution in the direction of trade unionism."⁴² Sure enough, the first wave of labor organizations followed in the 1860's. Groups like Havana's

⁴⁰ Jean Stubbs, *Tobacco on the Periphery: A Case Study in Cuban Labour History, 1860-1958* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 69.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 85.

⁴² Robert J. Alexander, *A History of Organized Labor in Cuba* (Westport: Praeger, 2002), 8.

Asociasion de Tabaqueros were designed to “band together in sickness and death, and they served as social and educational centre providing libraries and schools.”⁴³ Identifying as reformists, these groups believed that changes in the workplace could occur with the cooperation of manufacturers. This more cooperative form of organizing experienced some success in the 1860’s but was largely cut off following the paranoia and violence that ensued with the Ten Years War. As émigrés spread to the United States, their experiments in labor organizing would only grow.

Following the start of the Ten Years War, thousands of cigar workers, laborers, and intellectuals fled the island. Surrounded by issues of race and class, cigar workers had a different set of concerns when compared to revolutionaries like Cespedes. Authors like Sibylle Fischer have shown that the anonymity offered by nineteenth-century urban centers allowed Caribbean artisans the ability to form workers associations, mutual-aid societies, and other unique cultural markers.⁴⁴ These opportunities presented both a boon to the multiracial work forces of cities and a threat to colonial authorities attempting to tighten control of imperial possessions. As a result, the cigar workers that moved to Key West brought with them a burgeoning working-class culture that already viewed itself as having fundamental differences with the insurgency’s leadership. Joan Casanovas has noted that during the various conflicts within the independence movement, exiled Cubans always articulated a vision of a free Cuba that was more inclusive and increasingly “clashed with the more conservative wing...”⁴⁵

⁴³ Stubbs, 92-93.

⁴⁴ Sibylle Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 57-76.

⁴⁵ Casanovas, 10.

For much of the late nineteenth century, cigar workers in Key West oscillated between independence and labor rights. During the Ten Years War in particular, labor organizing was relatively quiet. The immediate concerns of the future of Cuba and the separating of families took precedent during this period. However, as the Ten Years War came to a close, organizing began to pick up. By 1874, the Union of Cigar Makers of Key West were organized on the island and it became the first of many labor unions that would represent Key West workers.⁴⁶ It became customary for labor organizers to ramp up organizing following lulls in the independence movement—a trend that was true in Havana as well. In 1878, following the Treaty of El Zanjón, the *Gremio de Obreros del Ramo de Tabacuerias* was founded in Havana. The organization boasted more than 4,000 members as cigar makers “fulfilled their old dream of opening a citywide union for tobacco workers.”⁴⁷ By 1879, the *Union de Tabaqueros* was founded in Key West. This organization was much more likely to confront manufacturers and was led by a multiracial coalition that included prominent Cubans of color like Francisco Segura and Guillermo Sorondo. They led a large strike later in 1879 that led to victories over the classification of cigars and a general wage increase. The union was short lived but unionization would become a trend in Southern Florida’s Cuban communities. During economic downturns or periods of perceived abuse by manufacturers, cigar workers would again organize and fight a protracted battle with cigar manufacturers. During these periods, cooperation between cigar workers in Havana and Key West proved fruitful. Striking cigar workers in one town could stay and fight or go to the sister city for short-term work. Steamships traveled between the two islands several times a week and the six hour trip became a regular voyage in the life of a cigar

⁴⁶ *New South*, July 18, 1874.

⁴⁷ Casanovas, 129.

worker. Additionally, these transnational cooperatives could aid the other with strike funds and other material support. This trend would continue in Key West and later incorporated Ybor City as part of the network.⁴⁸

Manufacturers as Revolutionaries

Cigar manufacturers were also a crucial part of Key West's growth. For much of the United States, the late nineteenth century was filled with acrimonious battles between labor and capital. As labor began to form a cogent movement behind groups like the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor, relations between industrial owners and workers were notably tense. For most of the late nineteenth century, Key West followed some of these trends but also included stretches of concord between owners and manufacturers. Unlike their American counterparts, cigar manufacturers in Key West shared an important commonality with their workers—they all were ardent supporters of Cuban independence. The reasons for this shared sympathy were varied. For many manufacturers born on the island, they were among the first generation to have grown up with a sense of a distinctly Cuban identity, and having seen *peninsular* favoritism on the island, they became swept up in the revolutionary rhetoric of the period. However, even some *peninsulares* became swayed by the insurgent argument—they too, became targets of the Spanish volunteers if they were viewed as being too close to their workers. For these reasons, many cigar manufacturers understood the economic and political benefits of independence. This common bond between workers and manufacturers was frequently used to settle labor disputes. The organizing power of cigar workers would grow throughout the

⁴⁸ Casanovas, 129, 166; Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (London: Verso, 1999), 241; Ronning, 30; Gerald E. Poyo, "Cuban Patriots in Key West, 1878-1886: Guardians at the Separatist Ideal," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (July 1982): 22.

nineteenth century, but in the early period of Cuban settlement in Key West, the relationship between workers and manufacturers was more collaborative than adversarial.

A major part of the more egalitarian outlook of Key West was rooted in the initial concord between manufacturers and workers. During the first decade of settlement, Key West had the unique privilege of having manufacturers and cigar workers that were equally devoted to the cause of independence. The political attacks of cigar workers in Cuba have been well documented, but manufacturers, too, were frequently chased out of Cuba for any sympathies with the independence movement. Vicente Ybor, a Spaniard by birth, was accused of supporting the independence movement and giving employment to supporters of the movement. He was set to be arrested when he fled the island. Similarly, Cecilio Henriquez was also a manufacturer turned revolutionary. Born in Matanzas, Cuba, he owned a cigar factory in Havana. Upon receiving threats on his life for supporting Cuban independence, he moved to Key West in 1869. From there, he served on the advisory board of the San Carlos, was president of various revolutionary clubs, and an arms provider for Cuban forces. Proudly Cuban, when he was once asked if there was anything Spanish in his home, he replied by saying “In this house, even the cat is Cuban.”⁴⁹ Disagreements occurred between manufacturer and employer. However, during the first several years, relations between capital and labor were especially strong and united over the Cuban wars of independence. As Gerardo Castellanos would observe, “little was needed to lower the level of labor unrest. During the day the manufacturer was tight and ambitious, but at night in the Club San Carlos, he was in arms with his workers as equals discussing the momentous

⁴⁹ “Cecilio Henriquez,” *Revista de Cayo Hueso*, October 10, 1898. 17-18.

problems of the revolution.”⁵⁰

Others, like Eduardo Gato, were directly involved in the military campaigns of the independence movement. Gato, born in Santiago de las Vegas, joined Cuban insurgents at the beginning of the Ten Years War. Working under Federico Pons, the 21 year old Gato was involved in the northwest campaign of the war. Like Ybor, Gato was soon identified and “the volunteers of Bejucal asked for his head...” Pons provided Gato with safe passage and relocated him in Havana. There, Gato stayed in a home that frequently hosted Spanish officials that recently arrived from Europe. Thinking back on these days, he remembered in painstaking detail how officers over dinner would discuss their wishes to kill members of the Cuban insurgency. Gato soon boarded a steamer to the United States and eventually landed in New York. Following a failed filibuster campaign and a stint as a cigar maker in the northeast, Gato moved to Key West and opened his own factory. Gato’s Florida factories would later become some of the largest in the state and his Key West factory possessed its own subsection of the island known as Gatoville. As a new millionaire, Gato provided financial assistance to the independence movement for decades and was one of the most vocal supporters of a free Cuba.⁵¹

As such, manufacturers in Key West were situated somewhere between the company town model of the late nineteenth century and a truly collaborative community that worked toward a common goal. Housing was set up in a manner typical of other company towns. By the late nineteenth century, larger manufacturers controlled entire neighborhoods—this is seen in

⁵⁰ Gerardo Castellanos G., *Motivos de Cayo Hueso: (Contribución a la Historia de las Emigraciones Revolucionarias Cubanas en los Estados Unidos)* (Havana: Ucar, Garcia, and Cia, 1935), 141.

⁵¹ Raoul Alpizar y Poyo, *Eduardo Hidalgo Gato (Apuntes Biograficos de su Vida y Sus Grandes Servicios a la Libertad de Cuba)* (Havana: Julio Arroyo, 1926).

entire plots that were known as Gatoville, Pohalski City, and Castillo City. Manufacturers built hundreds of homes that were rented to local cigar makers. With that said, these arrangements did not bear out the paternal tone of similar experiments like the Pullman Company's efforts in Chicago. As one worker famously noted about the Illinois town, "We are in a Pullman house, fed from the Pullman shop, taught in the Pullman school, catechized in a Pullman church, and when we die we shall be buried in the Pullman cemetery and go to the Pullman hell."⁵² The company town models of Key West were decidedly less sinister. To begin with, exerting this type of control on cigar workers would have been nearly impossible. Cuban cigar workers were highly mobile and skilled workers that were resistant to being controlled in any way. As thousands of cigar workers floated in and out of the island, company housing became an efficient way to accommodate the transient work force that served the cigar factories. Thus, the company town model was largely held to housing. Local shops, restaurants, and providers of other basic services were typically founded organically by enterprising Cubans. With that said, manufacturers were genuinely interested in Cuban independence—it benefitted them as well. As a result, collaboration between manufacturers and workers provided a link that was especially strong during the earlier half of the independence movement. It is true that employers could abuse this privilege. Striking and organizing activity in Key West was regularly followed with the riposte from manufacturers that called for peace for the sake of the revolution.⁵³ This relationship between labor militancy and nationalist fervor would later prove its inherent contradiction. However, for the early years of Cuban Key West, the social and economic fabric of the island was largely held together by amiable relations between workers and manufacturers.

⁵² Eric Arnesen, *Encyclopedia of U.S. Labor and Working-Class History* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 300.

⁵³ Gerald Eugene Poyo, *With All, and for the Good of All*, 89-90.

The Cuban Transformation of Key West

In 1884, a New York Times correspondent traveled to Key West to report on the peculiar conditions of the island. Walking around the city, he noted, “Cubans? Enough of them to give the place a Spanish air, and make it look like anything but an American city...Restaurants? No end to them. Every third house seemed to be a little Spanish restaurant with open door, sanded floor, and chairs and tables.”⁵⁴ Indeed, Key West by the 1880’s was fully realized as a Cuban outpost. This shift had profound effects on the city’s layout, demographics, and relationship to the United States.

Soon after the Cuban community established roots in Key West, cigar factories dotted every part of the island. The factories grew at a rapid pace: 15 in 1873, 57 in 1880, 80 in 1883, and well over 100 throughout the 1890s.⁵⁵ Given that the island is only 7.4 square miles, the number of cigar buildings condensed within the island was remarkable. A cursory glance at the city's 19th century Sanborn maps points to the dominance of the cigar industry. The 1889 Sanborn map of Key West contains a list (not exhaustive) of the major businesses in Key West—90 were listed and 53 of them were cigar factories. This is excluding other businesses such as warehouses, lithographic shops, and box stores that existed to support the cigar industry. The Sanborn map broke Key West into 15 neighborhoods. Every neighborhood possessed several cigar factories. From the wealthiest neighborhoods along Duval Street to the working-class area around La Africana, cigar factories could be found anywhere in the city.⁵⁶ The factories ranged

⁵⁴ *New York Times*, May 11, 1884.

⁵⁵ Glenn L. Westfall, *Key West, Cigar City, USA*. (Key West: Willis + Co, 1997), 27.

⁵⁶ “Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Florida,” *University of Florida George A. Smathers Libraries*, <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/results/?t=sanborn>.

greatly in size. The largest such as E.H. Gato's employed nearly 1,000 workers while the smallest factories had about 10-20 employees.

The cigar industry also spurred considerable changes in demographics. The overall population was the most obvious change. Prior to the arrival of the cigar industry, Key West never possessed more than a few thousand inhabitants. Again, the increases were rapid: 5,016 in 1870, 9,890 in 1880 and 18,080 in 1890. By 1880, Key West stood as the largest city in the state of Florida—a distinction it would hold until the 1920s. More importantly, the Florida State Census of 1885 showed how 41% of Key West's workers labored in the cigar industry. Up until the cigarette boom of the 1920s, cigar factories remained the leading employers of Key West.

The demographic shift also changed the ethnic and racial composition of Key West. Cuban influence in particular became very pronounced by the end of the nineteenth century. The 1885 Census is again instructive for viewing this shift. There were 13,945 inhabitants in Key West in 1885. 25% were born in the Bahamas, 32% were born in Cuba, 34% were born in Key West, and 9% were born in other countries and other areas of the United States. As Consuelo Stebbins has noted, after factoring in second-generation Cubans who were born in Key West, Cubans were the largest single ethnic group on the island in the late nineteenth century.⁵⁷ This also boosted the black population of the island as many black Cubans also migrated to work in Key West's cigar shops. The 1880 census noted that over 20% of the Cuban population in Key West was black or mulatto.⁵⁸ The black Cuban population was also fully integrated in Cuban

⁵⁷ Consuelo E. Stebbins, *City of Intrigue, Nest of Revolution: A Documentary History of Key West in the Nineteenth Century* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 84-85.

⁵⁸ Antonio Rafael de la Cova, "Cuban Exiles in Key West During the Ten Years War, 1868–1878," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 89, no. 3 (Winter 2011): 298.

society in both the workplace and residential areas. A recent demographic analysis noted that “Cubans lived on thirty-one streets in Key West in 1880. Twenty-one of them were racially integrated, in contrast to the segregation practiced in other Florida cities.”⁵⁹

The majority of migrating Cubans went into the cigar industry but the population boom led to the creation of other businesses that would support the cigar communities. For many professionals in Cuba, South Florida offered an opportunity to join a Cuban community without the threat of political violence from Spain. A glance through city directories shows that Cubans staffed many industries other than cigar making. An 1889 edition of *El Yara*, the most popular Spanish newspaper in Key West, listed a directory of professionals in Key West. The names alone allude to the clear influence that Cubans had in many services and industries. Rodolfo Valdes and Rafael Garcia are listed as barbers, Rodolfo Valdes and Esteban Delmas as dentists, and Manuel Vidal and Benito Bordas as doctors. In nearly any profession, various Cubans were listed.⁶⁰

The heightened Cuban presence had a marked effect on the city's appearance and culture. Physical spaces began to be constructed that reflected Cuban interests. Mutual-aid societies, cafes, and revolutionary societies became mainstays of Key West. Two buildings of particular importance were the aforementioned San Carlos Institute and La Sociedad de Cuba. Both functioned as cultural centers where Cubans could access essential services, tap into revolutionary networks, and socialize. The San Carlos Institute in particular was central to health care and forming revolutionary committees to support the fight for independence against Spain. La Sociedad de Cuba was known for its lavish parties and public demonstrations of Cuban

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ *El Yara*, May 26, 1889.

culture. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, *Comparsa* parades occurred outside of La Sociedad de Cuba and Key West inhabitants, regardless of ethnicity, would participate.⁶¹ All of these elements led to a distinctively foreign air about Key West.

As in other border towns of the nineteenth century, Key West was an aberration in the American context. Needless to say, American visitors were perplexed by the United States' southernmost town. Many travelogues profiled Key West in the late nineteenth century with the general reaction being somewhere between charmed and bewildered. A Mansfield Daily Shield account of Key West noted that Cubans were "exceedingly clannish" and "have changed little or not at all" since entering the United States.⁶² Similarly, George Barbour's 1884 travelogue of Florida argued that "The business houses and public buildings, the dwellings, the gardens, lawns, flowers, trees, soil, and vegetation, the appearance of the people, their costumes, and even their names, all are so un-American and suggestive of a foreign clime, that it is difficult indeed to realize it as one of the busy enterprising cities of our United States."⁶³ The illusory association that Key West shared with the United States was a frequent trope. Another offered that "The wonder is the greater, however, here, inasmuch as Key West is a part of the United States, notwithstanding it does not always receive due credit for that fact. For instance, you can frequently hear persons remark here that they intend to return to the States at such and such a

⁶¹ L. P. Artman, *Old Key West Stories* (Key West: Key West Chamber of Commerce, 1975), 7.

⁶² *Mansfield Daily Shield*, July 12, 1898.

⁶³ George M. Barbour, *Florida for Tourists, Invalids, and Settlers: Containing Practical Information Regarding Climate, Soil, and Productions; Cities, Towns, and People; the Culture of the Orange and Other Tropical Fruits; Farming and Gardening; Scenery and Resorts; Sport; Routes of Travel, etc., etc.* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1882), 152.

time; and once a Federal official located here received an order from one of the departments at Washington relieving him, and directing him to ‘return to the United States at once!’”⁶⁴

Looking North

During the mid-1880s, Key West was defined by two crises: significant clashes between labor and manufacturers and an unforeseen disaster that crippled Key West’s Cuban community and economy. In 1880, the short-lived Little War concluded. This was the second of the three independence wars between Cuba and Spain—Cuban insurgents were quickly quelled in this conflict by the Spanish in little over a year. Cubans soon continued the trend of ratcheting up labor activity in moments of peace. By 1885, Cuban cigar makers in Key West launched one of the largest strikes in the city’s history. The causes were varied. Workers in one factory reported that they were being deducted the cost of supplies from their wages, another reported regular acts of wage theft, while the Stachelberg & Co. factory was accosted for not having a Cuban flag permanently outside the factory. Individual complaints aside, there was a unified concern that factory workers across the city, as Key West’s Cigarmakers’ Union reported in a release: “We demand a uniformity of prices, and insist on placing in every factory a list of classes of cigars and rates to be paid for each, and manufacturers who do not conform thereto must close their doors.”⁶⁵ Each cigar factory produced a range of cigars ranging from cheaper, working-class cigars to luxury cigars depending on the quality of the tobacco. Workers demanded a uniform system for determining the price of these cigars and also demanded that workers be paid more for rolling premium cigars. This was a matter of contention that would frequently need to be

⁶⁴ *New York Times*, January 2, 1874.

⁶⁵ *United States Tobacco Journal*, August 8, 1885.

bargained and resettled over the course of South Florida's cigar industry. Nevertheless, the broader point was that labor organizing became a central facet of Key West. Manufacturers fought union recognition but workers became committed to organizing and groups like Key West's Cigarmakers' Union became increasingly militant as Cubans at home and abroad became increasingly influenced by nineteenth century Spanish socialism. Ultimately, the 1885 strike forebode the militant organizing that would spread among Cuban cigar makers in the closing years of the nineteenth century. In response, several Cuban manufacturers began to consider relocating their cigar operations.

Confrontations between labor and capital were miniscule when compared with Key West's Great Fire of 1886. Many of the United States' most catastrophic fires occurred in the late nineteenth century. Rapid industrialization coupled with limited firefighting units led to crippling blazes across the United States. During 1871 and 1872 alone, four of the costliest and deadliest fires in United States history occurred—Chicago, Boston, Port Huron, and Peshtigo all suffered fires that killed hundreds, ravaged infrastructure, and destabilized local communities. Much of modern firefighting was created in the wake of these fires.⁶⁶ Each fire had its unique lore but nearly all fires of this scale possessed key traits: areas with a preponderance of wooden structures, a limited water supply, and wind. Key West's cluttered 2x4 mile area possessed this confluence on March 30th, 1886. Nearly every Key West structure was built with wood, an unstable water supply has been a key feature of the Florida Keys for nearly its entire modern history, and March, as fate would have it, is also Florida's windiest month. Lastly, a historic and catastrophic quirk: the city of Key West possessed one steam fire engine—on March 30th, it was

⁶⁶ See Bruce Hensler, *Crucible of Fire Nineteenth-Century Urban Fires and the Making of the Modern Fire Service* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2011).

in New York City being repaired. In the waning hours of the night, the fire began at the San Carlos. This note of irony has not been lost on Key West natives, some of whom still argue that the fire was a Spanish plot. With the fire centered in the San Carlos, the flames were situated in the heart of Key West and soon spread to nearly every part of Downtown Key West—Duval, Eaton, Caroline, Fleming, Whitehead, and nearly every other major artery in the city was directly affected by the blaze. With the city’s lone steam fire engine being repaired in New York City, the fire was fought with small hand engines.⁶⁷ The shifts in the wind made battling the fire nearly impossible and the fire raged on for over 12 hours.⁶⁸ Some of the most prominent cigar factories, including Ybor and Sanchez & Haya’s, were lost in the fire. In the end, the fire caused around \$2 million in damage and left many Key West residents displaced from their homes. Overnight, thousands of Cubans lost their livelihood and homes in one of the worst disasters in nineteenth-century Florida. The Cigarmakers’ Union of Key West launched a relief committee led by Ramon Rivero. The committee dispersed emergency funds to cigar workers who suddenly found themselves without a job. Hundreds of cigar workers boarded the Spanish *Jorge Juan* the following day to return to Cuba. The city was in total despair and some aspects of the town were never the same.⁶⁹

Conclusion

Following the outbreak of Cuba’s Ten Years War, Key West became one of several Cuban

⁶⁷ Browne, 152.

⁶⁸ Del Rio, 6.

⁶⁹ Ibid; *New York Times*, April 1, 1886, April 2, 1886, April 5, 1886; “443 Years of Key West,” Unknown and undated publication. Special Collections, University of South Florida. Tony Pizzo Collection, Box 50, Folder Key West.

émigré communities in the United States. Isolated and sparsely populated, Cubans were able to turn Key West into the largest city in Florida and build a cigar industry that propelled much of the city's growth. The community was an oddity in the United States—mostly Cuban and far from American, Key West became a Caribbean hub that bore only passing resemblance to the rest of Florida. In the process, Key West also became a centerpiece of the Cuban independence network. With Cuban communities strewn throughout the United States, Key West played an active role in the military and literary activity that linked together the United States' many Cuban enclaves. Among these enclaves, Key West stood out because of its working-class identity. The egalitarian and multiracial nature of cigarmaking brought together black and white Cubans in unison over the future of Cuba and the state of race relations within the independence movement. While the insurgency's leadership had conservative impulses, Cubans in Key West provided a different vision of a free Cuba that would place the needs of workers and Cubans of color at the forefront.

The early history of Key West's Cuban communities also hinted towards the potential for discord among workers and manufacturers. Relations between the two groups were largely amiable in the early period, but the strike of 1885 demonstrated that workers were increasingly willing to organize and clamor over their working conditions and wages. Over time, it became clear that the dual rise of working-class radicalism and revolutionary nationalism presented some inherent contradictions. During moments of conflict with Spain, these tensions were easier to control given the immediate needs of the Cuban insurgency. However, in moments of relative concord, workers became increasingly interested in labor organizing. This also reflected changes in Havana. There, workers associations became increasingly common, and the possibility for cooperation between the two cigar centers only increased in the late 1880s and 1890s.

Anticipating greater labor troubles in Key West, Vicente Ybor began to plan. A year before the Key West fire of 1886, he had already purchased a large plot of land from the Tampa Board of Trade. The unincorporated chunk of land was largely barren swampland. Settling the area would not be easy. However, one of the major perks of the region was the newly constructed Plant System. This railroad connected Tampa to the Eastern seaboard and provided a valuable passage for business interests in Florida. The East Coast Railway which connected Key West to Henry Flagler's railway would not be completed until the twentieth century. Following the fire, Ybor decided the time was right to relocate his entire operation to the Tampa Bay Area. The city would become an even more successful cigar hub than Key West. Fittingly, the new town was dubbed Ybor City. He hoped that a new location and a new set of workers would change the dynamic between capital and labor. In the relative isolation of Tampa, collaboration among workers would be more difficult. Moreover, he believed the introduction of Spanish workers in the factory would complicate organizing and leave workers less united. Ybor was wrong on all counts. In Ybor City, an even larger cigar hub would emerge, but the essential dispositions and character of the workers remained the same. This led to even greater efforts towards organizing on a regional basis and provided some of the most fruitful collaborations between the cigarmakers of Key West, Ybor City, and Havana.

Chapter 2 – Between Movements: Labor Militancy and Revolutionary Nationalism, 1886-1898

Introduction

“Frequent were the trips by the Cuban revolutionaries between Tampa and Key West and Tampa and New York. I also heard the Italian, Orestes Ferrara (who claimed to be an anarchist) and the Polish Roloff.”¹

- Antonio del Rio

The intermingling of a Spanish-born Cuban cigar maker, an Italian radical, and a Polish freedom fighter speaks to the many ways in which Southern Florida was being simultaneously shaped by local and international events in the late nineteenth century. Antonio del Rio, whose voyage to Florida was captured in the last chapter, was representative of many cigar makers who received a political education during their time in Southern Florida. Émigrés were attuned to both the regional concerns of Cuban independence and the international concerns over nationalism and workers’ rights. In the case of Carlos Roloff and Orestes Ferrara, their lives represented various battles regarding political freedom and workers’ rights. The Warsaw-born Roloff dedicated his life to causes centered on human liberty. As a young man, he moved to the United States, and served in the Union army during the Civil War, eventually becoming a lieutenant. A job in the sugar industry later landed him in Cuba where he soon became swept up in the Cuban independence movement. Beginning with the Ten Years War, he became a permanent fixture of the movement, raising money for the cause in émigré communities and

¹ Emilio del Rio, *Yo Fui Uno de los Fundadores de Ybor City* (Tampa, 1972), 12.

serving militarily in both the Ten Years War and the Cuban War of Independence.² Similarly, Ferrara was an honorary Cuban by way of historical circumstance. Born in Naples in 1876, he was radicalized as a university student and became an adherent of anarchism. While at the University of Naples as a law student, he became impassioned with the Cuban cause and also served militarily during the Cuban War of Independence. As he aged, Ferrara became a long-time presence in Cuban politics and shed much of his radicalism—but in the cigar factories of Southern Florida in the 1890s, he found many sympathetic listeners as a young leftist.

Men like Roloff reflected the persistent importance of Cuban independence in towns like Key West and Ybor City. The period that this chapter covers, between 1886 and 1898, began with a lull in separatist organizing. After the arduous defeat of the Ten Years War (1868-1878) and the quickly vanquished Little War of 1879, workers in émigré centers began to focus more on their material concerns. However, by the 1890s, new leadership sparked a renewed sense of urgency that developed into the most potent iteration of the Cuban independence movement. Gerald Poyo and Joan Steffy have chronicled how these communities played a critical role in galvanizing support for the Cuban War of Independence and financing the war.³ The revolutionary activity that began in Key West grew increasingly complex and connected to émigré centers throughout the United States. During this period, Cubans in Florida continued to play a central role in financing the independence movement and later also serving as members of

² U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, *Report of the Provisional Governor of Cuba From December 1, 1907 to December 1, 1908*, 60th Cong., 2d sess., 1909. Committee Print, 79.

³ Gerald Eugene Poyo, *With All, and for the Good of All: The Emergence of Popular Nationalism in the Cuban Communities of the United States, 1848-1898* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989); Joan Steffy, "The Cuban Immigrants of Tampa, Florida, 1886-1898" (MA thesis, University of South Florida, 1975).

its military. In addition, nearly every major luminary of the Cuban insurrection visited Key West and Ybor City—this became an essential trip for militants looking to coordinate activity and raise funds. It was during this period that the *Partido Revolucionario Cubano*, or PRC was founded, with its roots largely in Southern Florida. This organization tied together every major émigré center in the United States in a uniform effort to fight for Cuban independence. The organization also had a vibrant literary press which was how the aforementioned Ferrara found out about the insurrection and how to become involved. Key West and Ybor City became centerpieces in this organization and their efforts were instrumental in the final war of independence from 1895 to 1898.

A concurrent development during this period was the arrival of working-class radicalism to Southern Florida. As in many urban areas of Europe and the United States, the workers of Key West and Ybor City became dedicated to developing a collective sense of identity as workers and began a fervent period of organizing. The rise of radical ideology is explained, in part, by growing trends in Havana. The growth of working-class consciousness in Southern Florida was deeply tied to the earliest anarchists in Cuba's labor movement who were almost always tied to the cigar industry. Given the overlap between cigar makers in the Caribbean, workers in Key West and Ybor City also embraced these ideas. Away from the watchful eyes of Spanish authorities, workers in Southern Florida were able to propagate these ideas with greater freedom. An additional factor that spurred Southern Florida's labor militancy was imported from Southern Europe. This was particularly pronounced in the newly founded Ybor City. There, Cuban workers labored alongside smaller populations of Spanish and Italian workers that brought with them the nascent radicalism of their native towns. The contemporary debates over Marx, Proudhon, and Bakunin that played out in Europe's city centers were echoed in the small cigar

towns of Southern Florida. George Pozzetta and Gary Mormino have been instrumental in showing the roots of Italian radicalism in Southern Florida.⁴ Italian workers, largely Sicilian in Southern Florida, transplanted their worker's organizations to the United States and articulated a working-class vision that resonated with the immigrant communities of Florida. This chapter will outline how a similar dynamic explains the connection between Spanish anarchism, Havana's cigar unions, and the radical politics of Cubans and Spaniards laboring in Southern Florida's Clear Havana industry.

From 1886-1898, revolutionary nationalism and working-class internationalism became the defining issues of Cuban communities in Southern Florida. Ferrara's allegiances, between workers and a liberated Cuba, were emblematic of the general feeling of cigar workers in the Clear Havana industry. For nationalists, Cuban independence was everything. The details over the character of the new republic mattered, but everything was secondary to self-rule and the need to break from Spain. Conversely, many working-class radicals argued that nationalism was another ruse in a long line of deceptions that would fail to bring workers any closer to true equality. These ideas were debated vigorously and as the strike became an ever-present weapon in Southern Florida, many nationalists argued that workers were beginning to undermine Cuban independence. To add to this problem, Cuban workers were unified on a transnational basis. Cooperation between Key West, Ybor City, and Havana became a potent weapon of the cigar makers. A strike in Key West could be supported financially by sympathetic workers in Havana and Ybor City. Similarly, a strike in Ybor City would be less strenuous on workers who knew they could just as easily travel to a sister cigar city and be employed until the strike was settled.

⁴ Gary Ross Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their Latin Neighbors in Tampa, 1885-1985* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998).

It took the movement's most significant figure, José Martí, to temporarily assuage the tensions between the two sides. Martí was able to proffer an inclusive vision of the Cuban republic that drew together a complex coalition of Cubans that ranged from the wealthy aristocrats of rural Cuba to the anarchists of Key West's cigar factories. As in any coalition of this sort, the divisions between groups did not disappear, but for the three critical years that led to Cuban independence, these groups were largely united in the push for liberation.

Turning a Swamp into a City

The earliest cigar makers of Ybor City were greeted by the obvious: this 40-acre plot of swampland possessed very little in the way of natural beauty. Enrique Pendas described the area as a “stinking hole with swamps and pestilence everywhere.”⁵ Almost completely barren of women in its earlier period, John Cacciatore decided to bring his wife with him to Ybor City. He mentioned that, “When she arrived in Tampa she burst out crying at what she saw: wilderness, swamps, alligators, mosquitoes, and open closets. The only thing she would say when she arrived was: ‘Why have you brought me to such a place?’” Indeed, the alligators were king in early Ybor City. Remembering a small bridge he had to cross every day, Cacciatore recalled that “I was afraid to cross the bridge, and especially so at night, because of the alligators that lived there. They would often crawl into the bridge and bask there in the sun all day long.”⁶

It seemed unlikely at the outset, but Ybor City eventually became the largest cigar center of the Clear Havana cigar industry. Vicente Ybor and Ignacio Haya were chiefly responsible for the creation of Ybor City and the general expansion of the Clear Havana industry. While Haya

⁵ Enrique Pendas, interviewed by F. Valdes, Folklore Project, Life Histories, Works Progress Administration, 1935, 3.

⁶ John Cacciatore, Folklore Project, Life Histories, Works Progress Administration, 1935, 2.

and Ybor's decision looked hasty at first, there were various economic and political reasons for the move. Backed by a major influx of northern capital and a growing demand for Clear Havana cigars among American smokers, Ybor City was founded during an opportune historical moment that sparked the development of most of Southern Florida. Ybor and Haya moved to the Tampa Bay area just as Southern Florida was beginning a period of rapid expansion. Central to this growth was Henry Plant. Born in Connecticut, Plant was a railroad magnate who played an instrumental role in connecting Southern Florida to the rest of the United States. In 1884, his Plant System of railroad networks reached Tampa. This was set to occur simultaneously with a new steam line service that Plant would also fund. The new steamers, with frequent stops in Cuba, spurred even more movement between Havana and the Southern United States. This was a critical development. Key West had an ideal location for the Clear Havana industry because of its proximity to Cuba but it was still almost completely unconnected to Florida's mainland. These changes were part of a broader development that occurred in Southern Florida during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Just as Henry Plant linked the western part of Florida to the American mainland, the development of Florida's east coast was also underway. This was undertaken by Henry Flagler, the co-founder of John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil. As a pivotal figure of the Gilded Age, he spent his waning years dedicated to the task of modernizing the eastern coast of Florida and turning it into a vacation destination for northeastern snowbirds. Beginning with his construction of St. Augustine's Ponce de Leon Hotel in 1888, Flagler began a steady expansion and developed St. Augustine, West Palm Beach, and Miami. Similar to Plant, Flagler's crowning achievement was the Florida East Coast Railway which by 1912 provided continuous travel from Jacksonville to Key West. Much of modern Florida has its origins in this period and Ybor City was the beneficiary of this influx of money, people, and goods.

Ybor's success was also secured by the growing domestic demand for Clear Havana cigars. For many Americans, the Clear Havana cigar was a symbol of professional leisure. Clear Havanas offered the same quality of cigar as a Havana-made product for a fraction of the price. Throughout the nineteenth century, Cuban cigars were an international symbol of privilege. Because of American-imposed tariffs on Cuban cigars, Havana-made cigars in 1890 could run anywhere from 50 cents to 1 dollar per cigar. Conversely, a Clear Havana cost about 10 to 15 cents. National advertisements for Clear Havanas spoke to the accessibility offered by the Key West product. An advertisement in the *Milwaukee Journal* noted "This special sale of Key West Cigars...afford splendid saving possibilities to those who want to give good cigars as Xmas gifts."⁷ Similarly, another advertisement in the *San Bernardino Daily Courier* claimed that "The Southern Hotel Bar keeps none but fine goods...Go to the Southern Hotel Bar for Key West Cigars."⁸ To add to the Clear Havana's appeal, cigar experts in the nineteenth century believed most American cigars to be of sub-par quality. An 1890 *New York Times* article argued that "Of the whole number of cigars made in the United States...of 3,668,162,486 cigars made within our shores, over 3,000,000,000 of them would be regarded by the educated smoker who likes good tobacco as only fit to present to his mortal enemy. Some of them might be used to advantage as taking the place either of the rope or of electricity in the execution of hardened murderers."⁹ Critiques of American cigars were generally leveled at the inferior quality of American tobacco and the shoddy rolling techniques of its cigar makers. Growth in the Clear Havana industry coincided with the increasingly tenuous position of Havana's cigar industry. With so much

⁷ *Milwaukee Journal*, December 19, 1910.

⁸ *San Bernardino Daily Courier*, November 10, 1889.

⁹ *New York Times*, February 9, 1890.

tobacco and labor leaving Cuba for the United States, the island's cigar industry was in a constant state of flux in the late nineteenth century. As one article noted, "The Spanish, in accordance with their customs, are once more killing a goose which has long laid golden eggs for them."¹⁰

It was under these circumstances that Southern Florida's cigar centers enjoyed seemingly endless expansion. Following some early stumbling blocks, growth in Ybor City was rapid. A *Tobacco Leaf* report from 1886 noted that "A year ago the place was a wilderness; on November 20, 1885, the first house was completed; last Friday, when a reporter of the Tribune visited the place, there were 220 houses occupied by a thriving, industrious population of over 1,000, nine houses under construction and contracts for fourteen more."¹¹ While Key West lost some prominent factories to Ybor City, their production of Clear Havana cigars continued to expand in the late 1880s. Key West's cigar production reached its peak in 1890 producing 100 million cigars. Ybor City would continue to siphon off factories from Key West in the 1890s but the southernmost point of Florida continued to be a major cigar producing center. Combined, the Clear Havana cigar centers of Southern Florida were incredibly lucrative enterprises in the late nineteenth century.

Anarchism and its Spanish and Cuban Adherents

Jose Fernandez was an attaché to the Spanish vice-consul's office in Key West. The very nature of his position made him a pariah among a sea of Cubans—his behavior and general disposition did him no favors. In 1896, well into the Cuban War of Independence, Fernandez

¹⁰ *Florida Times Union*, December 3, 1886.

¹¹ *Tobacco Leaf*, October 9, 1886.

strode into the Duval House which was owned and operated by Josephine Bolio. One report noted that “Fernandez had been in the habit of lounging about the hotel and discussing the Cuban question in a manner that was very offensive to Mrs. Bolio...” On this particular night, Mrs. Bolio had enough and demanded that Fernandez leave. Proving to be obstinate, Fernandez plopped down in the restaurant’s piazza and continued his tirade against the Cuban insurgency.irate, Mrs. Bolio “followed Fernandez and slapped his jaws till they tingled. Mrs. Bolio continued to slap Fernandez till he beat a retreat in the direction of a drug store to seek salve for his wounded face.”¹² Unsurprisingly, being a Spaniard in a nineteenth century Cuban émigré community was not easy. This was most obvious in Key West where any Spanish presence was an invitation for opprobrium at best and a prelude to violence at worst. In the final years of the independence wars, the Cubans of Key West continued their historical antagonism against the Spanish by publicly demonstrating against them, writing scathing critiques of the Spanish Empire, and in one case, filing a case to deport several hundred Spanish workers.¹³ However, Ybor City presented an alternative. Key West was largely divided by ethnic origin. Cubans worked in cigar factories and small businesses that supported the Cuban population, Bahamians worked at sea, and Anglos worked in local government and other traditional institutions of power. Ybor City was fundamentally different. There, a confluence of Cubans, Spaniards, and Italians characterized Tampa’s Latin Quarter.¹⁴ While seemingly counterintuitive, many

¹² *Florida Times Union*, March 10, 1896.

¹³ *Florida Times Union*, January 19, 1894; *Florida Times Union*, January 25, 1894.

¹⁴ Latin was used in Ybor City to specifically refer to the town’s Cuban, Spanish, and Italian inhabitants. The usage of Latin in this dissertation will work in relation to the concept of “Latin Europe.” As Lawrence Friedman and Rogelio Perdomo have noted, “Latin countries in Europe have a common history. They were a central part of the

Spaniards shared a working-class vision with Cuban cigar makers. Anarchism and working-class organizations united many Spaniards and Cubans in common cause in Ybor City.

Spaniards eventually became an essential part of Ybor City but the tensions between Cubans and Spaniards were still present in the town's early days. The first sign of trouble came on the day that Sanchez & Haya and Ybor were set to open their factories and produce Ybor City's first cigars. The city that was created in part to avoid labor troubles had a strike on the very first day as the workers of Ybor's *Principe de Gales* factory went on strike. On the day that Vicente Ybor's factory was set to open, Pedro Garcia recalled that "the Cuban workers for Ybor refused to work with a Spaniard" foreman that was brought from New York.¹⁵ While the town's first day spoke to the natural antagonism between the two groups, the Spanish were gradually integrated into Ybor City. This transition was not always smooth and the conflicts between the Spanish Empire and the Cuban insurgency inevitably produced moments of conflict. Nevertheless, Spanish migrants were a complex amalgam in Ybor City. Some were indeed loyalists, others moved purely for economic reasons, and a substantive number of Spanish cigarmakers also sided with the Cuban revolutionaries. The tension between Cubans and Spaniards was largely

Roman Empire. Their populations speak languages derived from the common language of the empire, Latin. They share many other aspects of collective history. For example, they are predominantly Catholic countries, which has marked many of their values and attitudes, as well as the content of their laws. Capitalist development took place relatively late, compared to that in Northern European countries." By extension, Cuba as a colony of Spain maintained many of the same legal and institutional structures of the Latin Europe tradition. See Lawrence Meir Friedman, and Rogelio Pérez Perdomo, *Legal Culture in the Age of Globalization: Latin America and Latin Europe*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 1.

¹⁵ *Tampa Tribune*, September 5, 1965.

ameliorated by a common identity as workers—the role of anarchism in both Spain and Cuba was critical to this development.

The radical history of Cuba is inextricably tied to Spain. While the lengthy battles over independence characterized most of the island's relationship with the Iberian empire, common ground among workers proved a fertile area for collaboration. While the crown represented an Old World conservatism, members of the Spanish working class were the vanguard of anarchism in the nineteenth century—nearly every major working-class movement in Spain was echoed in Cuba. For many Spaniards, they were introduced to anarchism by way of the French Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. Frequently referred to as the father of Anarchism, his works spurred the first worker's organizations in Spain and were fiercely critical of the state. The Proudhon-inspired groups were reformist in nature and preached a non-violent transformation of the state. As greater numbers of Spaniards moved to Cuba in search of work, these ideas soon became propagated in Havana and other urban centers. The reformist organizations that were borne out of this immigration were covered in the last chapter. Their efforts were limited, groups were largely segregated, and change was gradual. Limitations aside, these groups heralded the first concerted effort to organize workers in Cuba. By the end of the 1860s, Spanish workers took a decidedly more radical turn and began to embrace the ideas of Mikhail Bakunin. Coincidentally, this took place at the same time as the Ten Years War. When Carlos Cespedes declared his *Grito de Yara* in October of 1868, a little-known anarchist from Naples arrived that same month in Spain lecturing on the work of Bakunin and encouraging workers to join the recently founded International Workingmen's Association. Giuseppe Fanelli became the conduit by which many Spaniards first encountered the revolutionary ideas of anarchism and the multifaceted IWA. Even though most workers were being exposed to Bakunin's form of anarchism for the first time, “the

‘Idea,’ as it became known, found a very enthusiastic audience. Within four years there were nearly 50,000 Bakuninists in Spain, of whom the majority were in Andalucia.”¹⁶ The efforts of anarchists in Spain led to their distinction as being in “the only country in the world where anarchism developed into a major movement.”¹⁷ During this period, direct confrontations with employers became more frequent and the use of violence became a tool used by the more extreme segments of Spanish anarchist organizations.

Reflecting the growth of worker’s movements in Spain, anarchism blossomed in Havana and Southern Florida during the 1880s. A key cog in this development was Enrique Roig San Martín, one of the most influential anarchists in Cuban history. Roig was a tireless advocate for worker’s rights and was an active contributor and the founder of many of the pioneering publications of the anarchist press in Cuba.¹⁸ Many of these newspapers were widely read in Key West and Ybor City with Roig’s *El Productor* hiring full-time correspondents in each town. Indeed, prominent Cuban anarchists like Roig, Enrique Messonier and Enrique Creci traveled or relocated to Southern Florida and played crucial roles in the development of anarchism in the Clear Havana industry. This trend extended to unionization. The reformist organizations that grew in the 1870s and early 1880s became replaced by groups like Key West’s *Federacion Local de Tabaqueros*. The confluence of radical influences in Ybor’s Latin community was readily apparent from the town’s inception. Enrique Pendas, an early settler from Asturias recalled, “I remember also a friend of mine who was a socialist. In those days I mixed up in everything.”¹⁹ Another cigar

¹⁶ Anthony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain: The Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 11.

¹⁷ Jerome Mintz, *The Anarchists of Casas Viejas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 2.

¹⁸ Frank Fernandez, *Cuban Anarchism: The History of a Movement* (Tucson: See Sharp Press, 2001), 20.

¹⁹ Enrique Pendas interview by F. Valdes, Folklore Project, Life Histories, Works Progress Administration, 1935, 2.

worker remembered that “I became somewhat enamored of radical ideas in the proletarian field...These advanced ideas were, at the time, a sort of ‘epidemic’ among the cigar makers.”²⁰

There were trying moments between Cubans and Spaniards in the 1890s, but Cubans quickly drew the distinction between Spanish laborers and Spanish loyalists. This was particularly true during the Cuban War of Independence. During Cuban parades, cigar makers from Havana would shout “Free Cuba!” which was met by antagonistic shouts of “All for Castille!” from some local Spaniards.²¹ And there were men like the aforementioned Jose Fernandez who never missed an opportunity to antagonize local Cubans in an attempt to seed discord and disrupt the Clear Havana industry. However, many of the Spanish workers viewed nationalism as less important than broader political and economic goals. As Pedro Esteve posited, “it is good to love *la patria*, but it is better to love liberty and justice.”²² Similarly, another Spaniard noted that “while it is well to love one's country, it is better to love man, justice, and liberty, as did Fonelli in Italy and Bakunin in Russia.”²³ The Spanish nationalists viewed these anarchists as traitors. But as one Cuban that lived in Ybor recalled, “there were so many Spaniards themselves who had suffered from the tyranny and the mismanagement of their own government...many of the Spaniards who were the ordinary street man were on the side of the Cubans.”²⁴ Working class Cubans and Spaniards alike were ultimately united against the

²⁰ Jose Ramon Sanfeliz, Folklore Project, Life Histories, Works Progress Administration, 1935, 2-3.

²¹ Steffy, 85.

²² Mormino and Pozzetta, 80.

²³ Steffy, 64.

²⁴ Francisco Rodriguez Sr., interview by Fred Beaton and Otis Anthony, African Americans in Florida Project, Special Collections, University of South Florida, August 11, 1978, 15-16.

Spanish Empire. Spaniards had experienced the limited freedoms offered to workers and citizens of Spain—their emigration was reflective of the lack of opportunities available for working people in Spain. Coming from a world that was sympathetic to the radical ideas of Proudhon and Bakunin, they had no particular adoration for the empire. Similarly, Cuban workers had witnessed their status as second-class citizens and the rampant use of *peninsular* privilege. Combined, both sides found common cause in Ybor City.

The Italians of Ybor City

STETSON KENNEDY: And you're living here in Ybor City?

AUGUSTINE VICARI: Yes, sir.

STETSON KENNEDY: Will you tell us how many languages you speak?

AUGUSTINE VICARI: Well, I speak English, *parlo Italiano, y hablo Cubano*.²⁵

- WPA Florida Recordings, August 26, 1939

Plenty of Italian Americans learned to “speak Cuban” in Ybor City. This small aside from Vicari’s WPA interview speaks to another fundamental difference between the development of Ybor City and Key West. During the early 1890s, Italians began to immigrate to Ybor City. Although the Italians were a definite minority among the Cubans and Spaniards, they played important roles in the social and political makeup of the Latin Quarter. The vast majority of Ybor’s new inhabitants arrived from Sicily. During the 1880s and 1890s, Sicily was a hub of labor unionism and radical politics. The *Fasci Siciliani* (Sicilian Workers Leagues) propagated an anarchist ideology that was brutally suppressed by the regime of Francesco Crispi. The leagues bridged together disparate groups ranging from sharecroppers to intellectuals to industrial workers. A substantive number of Sicilians came from New Orleans. Following the

²⁵ Augustine Vicari, interview by Stetson Kennedy, Folklore Project, Works Progress Administration, August 26, 1939.

murder of Police Chief David Hennessy, residents of New Orleans believed the crime was perpetrated by local Italians. New Orleans' existing anti-Italian sentiment coupled with Hennessy's murder sparked the Mafia Riots of 1891 that resulted in a mass lynching of eleven Italians. Following the incident, many Italians moved to New York and Ybor City. The emigrants from both Sicily and New Orleans were the product of chain migration. As one immigrant noted, "word spread like wildfire...and they began to have the courage to migrate."²⁶

The Italians experienced a particularly difficult transition to Ybor City. Unlike the Spaniards and Cubans, the Italians did not emigrate with skills as cigar makers. At first, many of the Spanish and Cuban cigar factories refused to hire them. The Sicilians had to resort to producing their own inexpensive cigars known as Cheroots that catered to the local Italian community or perform the lowest paying work in the factory. Italians would later become firmly entrenched in the Latin cigar factories but the transition was gradual. Making the transition to Ybor even more difficult, few of the Italians spoke Spanish. As Pedro Garcia, a Spanish cigar maker recounted, "They only spoke Spanish in the factories. The poor Italians couldn't speak English and they couldn't speak Spanish. So they had to learn Spanish."²⁷ Early Ybor City was especially adamant about the "Spanish-only" rule for Italians and Anglos. As a Tampa Tribune writer chronicling Garcia's life noted, he sternly commanded "*Habla Espanol,*" to any visitor in his home who uttered a word in another language."²⁸ As a result, Italians "to some extent

²⁶ Domenico Giunta, interview by Gary Mormino, University of South Florida Oral History Program, May 18, 1984,

7.

²⁷ *Tampa Tribune*, September 5, 1965.

²⁸ *Ibid*

assimilated their customs and characteristics.”²⁹ John Cacciatore is representative of many of the Sicilian workers that labored in Ybor City. Born to a peasant farmer in the Sicilian city of Santa Stefano di Quisquina, he moved to New Orleans in 1885 and began working for an Italian grocer. A few years later, he recalled “Several friends described Tampa to me with such glowing colors that I soon became entrusted, and decided to come here and try my fortune.” The transition was difficult. There were few Italians in Ybor City in 1887, but he was able to secure work at the Modesto Monet factory as a low-grade operative making \$1 a day. As one of the first Italian workers in a Clear Havana factory, he eventually was able to secure the trust of fellow workers and was apprenticed into learning how to be a cigar maker. As a cigar maker, Cacciatore was able to earn twice as much as before and was able to bring his wife to Ybor City where he eventually raised a family. Cacciatore’s narrative was typical of many Sicilians who were forced to navigate the peculiarities of Ybor City before becoming acclimated to the town.

In a city where wildcat strikes and labor organizing were the norm, the Sicilians were a welcome sight for many Cubans. Their fearlessness and penchant for radical politics ingratiated them to many workers in Ybor City. As Angelo Massari recalled, “When in 1902 I landed in Tampa, I found myself in a world of radicals for which I was prepared...in those days in Tampa, anarchists and socialists were many.”³⁰ The major gathering point for Italians became their mutual aid society, L’Unione Italiana, founded in 1894. Here, workers were able to not only secure basic necessities like medical services and immigration services, they also had access to a literary canon of classics and many recent works of Italian anarchism. Aside from possessing

²⁹ *Ybor City: Tampa’s Latin Colony* (Federal Writers’ Project of the Works Progress Administration for the State of Florida).

³⁰ Mormino and Pozzetta, 144.

many literary classics of Europe translated to Italian, a recent study of L'Unione Italiana's old library "uncovered sizable collection of socialist and anarchist literature. Pamphlets, books, and articles covering a wide spectrum of radical ideologies are present. Included are Italian language editions of the world's most famous revolutionary propagandists—Peter Kropotkin, Michael Bakunin, Leo Tolstoy, and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon." The study also noted that "Italian socialists and anarchists, many of whom spent time in America, authored most of the items found in this section. Luigi Galleani, an acknowledged leader of Italian-American anarchism, is represented (*The End of Anarchism?*, 1924), as well as the great revolutionary Errico Malatesta (*Anarchism*, n.d., *Among the Peasants*, n.d., *New Man*, 1934, etc.) Both of these individuals visited Tampa in the early part of the present century and this may help to explain their popularity." The Italians were a key addition to the multi-ethnic coalition in Ybor City and their background in radical politics helped continue to push the link between ideology and direct action in Southern Florida.

On Organizing and the Use of the Strike

By the 1890s, the labor movement in Southern Florida embraced a broader definition of solidarity by collaborating with workers in neighboring cigar towns and actively including the voices of black Cubans and Cuban women. The strongest labor efforts in Southern Florida were rooted in transnational coalitions. The use of coordinated strikes between Key West, Ybor City, and Havana became a powerful weapon under the newly radicalized cigar workers. Proximity had previously been the tool of manufacturers. The ease of transit between Cuba and Southern Florida allowed businessmen to maximize profit by avoiding tariffs on finished goods and allowed for a steady supply of nearby labor. However, by the 1880s, the cigar workers in Cuba and Southern Florida used this same proximity to coordinate direct actions and lessen the burdens of being on strike. These actions were borne out of some of the first anarchist-led strikes

in Havana and soon spread to Southern Florida. Striking on a regional basis allowed workers to provide support funds for striking workers, help cigar workers find temporary labor in another city while they were on strike, and also led to greater militancy among all workers. The advent of radical organizing in general also allowed for greater opportunities for Cuban women and Cubans of color. While the independence movement made overtures to both groups, there were still segments of the revolution that maintained a bias against Cubans of color in particular. Similarly, women were typically marginalized in the independence movement and largely relegated to symbolic roles. With each union being organized into subsections of guilds, women in particular used this opportunity to form some of the most militant wings of Southern Florida's labor movement. Similarly, Cubans of color began to participate in labor organizing as an additional way to address the biases and inequities in Cuban society.

The basis of transnational solidarity lay in one of the great weapons of the nineteenth century capitalist: the steamship. With Havana, Key West, and Ybor City being separated by a mere steamship ride, workers found out how to use this network to their own advantage. Enrique Roig San Martín, the aforementioned leader of Cuban anarchism, was central to this development. In 1888, his *Alianza Obrera* went on strike against Havana's Henry Clay cigar factory. The strike dragged on for months, strike funds became barren, and workers grew impatient. It was at this point that Roig decided to funnel workers into Key West and Ybor City. With Ybor City still growing at a rapacious pace, this was a perfect opportunity. The goal was to gain greater awareness about the strike and send much needed money to the striking cigar workers in Havana. Roig personally traveled to several émigré centers and lobbied for support—this proved to be an overwhelming success. A trade journal noted, "Every cigarmaker in Key West and Tampa, two large cigar manufacturing cities, have agreed to pay \$1 a week towards the

support of the strikers and hundreds have agreed to receive and house families coming from Havana.”³¹ The creation of these support networks, which had long existed informally, became a weapon in future labor actions.

The very next year, the cigarmakers of Key West launched one of their largest strikes over a wage increase. Similar to the Henry Clay strike, Key West’s workers traveled to Havana and Ybor City to seek respite from the strike. Almost immediately, workers in Havana began raising funds while cigar workers from Ybor City made a similar pledge and donated \$1 of their salary to the striking workers of Key West. Central figures of Cuban anarchism were particularly important during this strike. Enrique Messonier, a key cog in *La Alianza Obrera* and one of the architects of Key West’s *Federacion Local de Tabaqueros*, was an important figure that tied together Key West and Havana’s efforts. This was not lost on local manufacturers and Key West’s police. Messonier, along with Enrique Creci, were both deported from Key West for their efforts. Messonier in particular was detained and forced off of the island because “his presence here was detrimental to the place, as he was considered the chief promoter and maintainer of the existing troubles.”³² Nevertheless, by early 1890, Key West’s cigar makers won the strike and virtually all of their demands. Cigar workers at this point understood the power of their collective action and became even more adamant about using the strike as a tool to correct workplace infractions.

Roig passed away months before Key West’s general strike but this strategy became critical for winning large battles with manufacturers. One of the strongest advantages of

³¹ October 13, 1888. Special Collections, University of South Florida. Arsenio Sanchez Collection, Box 3, Folder 1886-1890.

³² *New York Times*, November 2, 1889; Fernandez, 23.

manufacturers was the ability to use their wealth as a way of wearing down workers. However, the adjoining cigar cities in the Clear Havana Caribbean zone provided a safety valve where workers could travel during longer strikes. Given the cordial and overwhelmingly Cuban presence in Key West and Ybor City, workers were easily able to integrate into each city. With Ybor City joining the Clear Havana network, all three major centers of Cuban cigarmaking would be working in concert with one another in mutual cooperation. As one contemporary from Key West noted, “A manufacturer that would think of leaving here to escape the strike nuisance for Tampa would be jumping from the frying pan into the fire.”³³ It was suggested then, and has also been recently suggested by some scholars, that the presence of anarchists in Southern Florida was part of a Spanish plot. The Spanish government undoubtedly enjoyed discord in Southern Florida’s Clear Havana industry—the industry, and its profits, were largely created to undermine the Spanish Empire and its rule in Cuba. However, this analysis is too short-sighted. The nascent anarchism and transnational solidarity that played out in Southern Florida was decades in the making in both Cuba and Southern Europe.

Cubans of color and women were deeply embedded in Southern Florida’s labor movement. For black Cubans, the labor movement became one of several ways to combat racial injustice in Cuban society. Dating back to the 1860s, Cubans of color in Southern Florida looked to build institutions and alliances aimed at improving their material condition. Martín Morúa Delgado and Rafael Serra used *sociedades de instruccion y recreo*³⁴ as a way to broach some of these issues in the independence movement. The *sociedades* were created to provide formal

³³ *Daily Tampa Tribune*, October 31, 1892.

³⁴ Frank Andre Guridy, *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 30.

education to Cuba's black population. By the 1880s and 1890s, many black Cubans also grew to embrace the labor politics of the Clear Havana industry. Francisco Segura and Guillermo Sorondo were among the Cubans of color that were particularly influenced by anarchism and spread its ideas in both Key West and Ybor City. Sorondo and Segura were especially important in the development of Key West's *Federacion Local de Tabaqueros* that in many ways mirrored Havana's *Alianza Obrera*. Sorondo was a well-known anarchist that was among the several activists that were forced to flee to Ybor City during Key West's 1889 general strike. For Cubans of color like Sorondo and Segura, the labor movement's focus on class identity was of particular interest. Away from the racial politics of the independence movement, the labor movement offered a form of organizing centered on working-class identity.

Women were also important participants in Southern Florida's labor movement. Unions were typically sub-divided into *gremios* that were separated by the major categories of cigar labor in the factory. The job of cigar stemmer, the process of removing the tobacco leaf from the stem, was a job that was occupied almost entirely by women. In part, this did point to the chauvinism that invaded much of Cuban culture during this period—stemmers received among the lowest wages in the factory and the more lucrative positions in the factory rarely were awarded to women. Nevertheless, women were able to use their position as a way of carving out an essential section of Southern Florida's unions. The female-led *gremios* were believed to be "one of the most active of the Cuban revolutionary groups in Key West."³⁵ This would only continue, and by the beginning of the twentieth century, female *gremios* were among the most

³⁵ *Cubans in Florida: Origins, Migrations, Industry, Unions* (Federal Writers' Project of the Work Projects Administration for the State of Florida), 8.

militant and successful Cuban working groups in Southern Florida.³⁶ For black Cubans, working-class organizations allowed for another dimension of understanding the unique challenges faced by Cubans as workers and as a multiracial group. For women, these opportunities provided something more. Cubans of color were undoubtedly viewed as central to Cuban independence, and even though flaws and limits were obvious, several prominent black Cubans occupied the highest rungs of the Cuban military and intelligentsia. For women, their role in the Cuban independence movement was more akin to Linda Kerber's idea of "republican motherhood" and was limited.³⁷ However, in worker's organizations, they grew to possess a strong voice and participated in direct actions across Southern Florida.

The growth of unionism in Southern Florida did not go unimpeded. Threats from vigilante committees and outside labor organizations, while not rampant during this period, did begin to take form. In Ybor City in particular, the use of vigilantism had its origins in the late nineteenth century. One of the key factors behind Vicente Ybor's decision to move to the Tampa Bay area were a series of assurances from Tampa's Board of Trade. In addition to a free plot of land that was valued at \$4,000, they also guaranteed "peaceful labor relations for those who might want to establish their cigar factories on his land."³⁸ The committee, made up of local businessmen and backed by police and local courts, was central to enforcing this promise. During the 1880s and 1890s, they used their power to curtail some labor activity. One of the

³⁶ See Nancy Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort: Women's Activism in Tampa, Florida, 1880s-1920s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

³⁷ See Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

³⁸ *Tampa Tribune*, September 25, 1985.

earliest examples occurred only a year after Ybor City's founding in 1887. This particular strike in Ybor's own factory pitted the local Cuban union against a group of Spaniards represented by the Knights of Labor. A Cuban foreman at the factory fired one of the Spanish workers, and the Spaniards demanded that he be re-hired. When Ybor denied their request, a tense battle ensued between the town's Cuban and Spanish population. The Spaniards went on strike and at one point, a scuffle broke out that killed one of the Spaniards. In an attempt to quell the tension, Ramon Rubiera de Armas, of New York City's Cuban Federation of Cigarmakers, traveled to Ybor City. The fight was soon settled and Rubiera decided to settle in Ybor City, continue organizing, and work as a lector in town. In response to his efforts, representatives of Tampa's Board of Trade arrested and forcefully deported him from Tampa. The Cuban Federation of Cigarmakers soon released a statement noting that "this arbitrary action was instigated by the capitalistic class of Ybor City in conjunction with the Spanish Government, which offered a large amount of money for the lynching or surrender of said Rubiera...we indignantly protest against this piece of high-handed, un American tyranny, and we call the attention of the Federal Government Congress and the press to this unwarranted action of the so-called committee of fifteen of the Board of Trade of Tampa, Fla."³⁹ This type of occurrence was not foreign to Key West. As aforementioned, several organizers were expelled in 1889 over their labor organizing.⁴⁰ There, a similar board of trade was formed stocked with local businessmen, judges, and the local police force. These committees exercised their power occasionally during this period but they set a dangerous precedent for a form of vigilantism which would become commonplace by the early twentieth century.

³⁹ *United States Tobacco Journal*, March 19, 1877.

⁴⁰ *New York Times*, November 2, 1889.

A Working-Class Revolution or a Free Cuba?

To Cuban nationalists, the nascent worker's movements in Havana, Key West, and Ybor City represented a distraction from the goal of *Cuba Libre*. The effort, money, and time being spent on organizing workers naturally distracted Cubans from working in revolutionary groups designed for Cuba's independence. This was especially evident in larger strikes that required coordination among workers. Large strikes in a cigar center were supported by workers deducting some amount (nearly always \$1) from their weekly wages to go towards striking workers. This was the same model used in *dias de la patria* where workers apportioned some percentage of their salary to be used on the Cuban insurgency. During this period, nationalists argued that the independence movement in émigré centers had been hijacked by anarchists, Spaniards, and opportunists looking to disrupt revolutionary organizing. Many workers in Key West and Ybor City attempted to balance the needs of both causes, but nationalists during this period were demanding more of their supporters. This clash between working-class radicals and nationalists became increasingly acrimonious in Cuba and Southern Florida. In one of his biggest accomplishments, José Martí, the leader of Cuba's revolutionary army, found a way to tie together a complex group of constituencies in order to spur the last push for Cuban independence.

By the 1880s, many nationalists believed that émigré centers had been corrupted by foreign influence. Key West in particular, the older and more anti-Spanish of Florida's émigré communities, argued that Ybor City's collaboration with Spanish workers was doing harm to the independence movement and the welfare of the Cuban people. In a bristling article in Key West's *El Yara*, one writer noted that "What do these Cubans not understand about these Spaniards that have only come to Ybor City to take the money that with much hardship we have earned by

working?...It is time that this town rid itself of this lobster that only comes to suck and corrupt...Out! Out!” On the topic of Ybor City’s radicalism, he noted that Cubans there were being Hispanicized and disillusioned “by the pretext of an impossible socialism.”⁴¹ This was a common refrain from critics of the labor movement. Many nationalists argued that aside from being a distraction, the socialist and anarchist ideas embraced by many workers were impractical. To them, a repudiation of these ideas would be essential for the future of Cuban independence.

In their defense, labor radicals argued that the nationalist movement was short sighted and was being used as a way of suppressing the efforts of cigar workers. Leading the charge on this front was *El Productor* and its correspondents in Southern Florida. In looking at strike waves in Havana and Southern Florida, the newspaper argued that this wave of organizing was the result of an understanding among workers that the nationalist movement would not solve the long-term problems of workers—this battle, by its nature, was international. An 1889 article argued that “workers cannot and should not be anything other than socialists, because socialism is the only idea that today confronts the bourgeois regime that enslaves us.”⁴² The collaborative relationships between workers and manufacturers became very tenuous during this period. The early period of émigré communities were centered on the common experiences that bound workers and owners together—however, as time went on manufacturers “had to contend with a labor leadership that accused them of plotting with the patriot capitalists to undermine the interests of the workers.”⁴³

⁴¹ *El Yara*, September 3, 1889.

⁴² Poyo, 89.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 90.

By the 1890s, it fell to José Martí to bring the disparate groups of revolutionary Cubans into a cogent movement. Described as “young, chronically ill, nervous, small of stature, intellectual, and, it has been said, hopelessly romantic,” he was an unlikely revolutionary.⁴⁴ He was only 15 years old when the Ten Years War began but he was imprisoned by the age of 17 for his revolutionary sympathies. He spent the next several years in exile in Europe and Latin America. Eventually, he settled in New York where he found an active émigré community and many avenues to publish his own political writing and poetry. A masterful orator and writer, it was here that he ascended into his leadership role as one of the insurrection’s primary figures. As he began to plot the next phase of the independence movement, he had two critical tasks: ameliorate the divisions between working-class radicals and nationalists and, on a related note, convince Cubans of color that Cuban independence also included them as a vital part of the future Cuban republic. To do this, Martí took advantage of the existing networks that existed within the United States’ Cuban émigré community. As someone who lived in exile in New York City for many years, he was well attuned to the émigré press and the connections between intellectuals and workers. Using these same networks, he began a concerted effort to unite the variegated members of Cuba’s émigré community.⁴⁵

In November of 1891, Ybor City’s Ignacio Agramonte Club extended an invitation to have Martí speak to the members of their Cuban club. While many Cubans were excited, this was a period of great uncertainty in Southern Florida. As one cigarmaker noted, “In spite of the aspiration for independence, the émigrés were divided by classes and even by age and by

⁴⁴ C. Neale Ronning, *José Martí and the Emigré Colony in Key West: Leadership and State Formation* (New York: Praeger, 1990), 2.

⁴⁵ Steffy, 37.

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...The factory owners, the *escogedores* and the other tobacco workers looked at each with distrust.”⁴⁶ Upon arrival, Martí first visited Ybor’s cigar factories where cigar makers fervently greeted him “with the pounding of cigar knives and tobacco leaves on the large rolling tables.”⁴⁷ On the night of November 25th, he delivered an eloquent, soaring address titled “*For All, and for the Good of All.*” The lecture pleaded for all Cubans, regardless of where they lived, to unite in common purpose for the purpose of Cuban independence. Martí bellowed: “let us rise up for the true republic, those of us who by our passion for right and by our habit of work know how to manage it; let us rise to give tombs to the heroes whose spirits wander through the world ashamed and solitary...And on our new flag let us put around the star this formula of triumphant love: For all and for the good of all!”⁴⁸ The speech “produced an outburst of spontaneous emotion among his listeners” whereby “the cheers and applause made the timbers of the building shake.”⁴⁹ Aside from the theatrics of the speech, Martí initiated a wave of large scale organizing in Ybor City with the intent of providing one final push towards Cuban independence. The number of independence groups blossomed during this period and spoke to the working class and multiracial coalitions that became the core of the émigré independence movement. Workers were expected to donate their time and money to independence groups and often belong to several. As one worker

⁴⁶ Ronning, 36.

⁴⁷ Steffy, 40.

⁴⁸ José Martí, *Obras Completas 4* (Havana: Ed. de Ciencias Soc., 1975), 266-270.

⁴⁹ José Rivero Muñoz, "Los Cubanos en Tampa," *Revista Bimestre Cubana* 74 (January-June 1958), 51; Leland Hawes, "Tampa Cigar Played Key Role in Cuban War," *History Heritage, Tampa Tribune*.

remembered, “At this factory we organized the patriotic club of ‘*Vengadores de Maceo*’ (Avengers of Maceo). I was made President of the club, and was also in charge of collecting donations given by the cigar-makers, among which were many Spaniards who contributed to the Cuban cause. I was also founder of another political club known as ‘Oracio S. Rubens.’ This was the name of the consulting attorney of Martí (Cuban apostle). After this club has been organized, we founded another club of which Mr. Victor M. Munoz was placed as president.”⁵⁰

A month later, Martí also visited Key West for the first time. After being invited by a committee led by Ángel Peláez, Martí arrived in Key West’s Duval House on Christmas Day in 1891. There, Martí stressed the urgency of the independence movement and urged Cubans to remember that their émigré communities were part of a broader goal to reclaim Cuba. Martí noted that “the soul of our people is dispersed and nostalgic in cold lands which lack the fire of our sun and the dignity of our palms. Today I can tell you without a doubt that I have seen the great majority united and now I feel them much closer; sometimes with intense pain, and other times with admiration, but always with spiritual respect for having created and maintained a number of patriarchs loyal to a single ideal within the small confines of this Cuban niche: the noble Key.”⁵¹ In a meeting two weeks later with many organizers in Key West, he also planted the seed for a renewed effort to connect émigré communities and to stage the final war for independence. Martí pressed on “how indispensable it was for Cuba’s citizens living abroad to bond in union and cordiality for a single cause and to help in the supreme undertaking of her emancipation from Spain.”⁵²

⁵⁰ Jose Ramon Sanfeliz, 3.

⁵¹ Ronning, 148.

⁵² Ibid, 151.

Another key part of Martí's visits was to heal the growing divide between labor activists and nationalists. Martí needed to strike a balance between appeasing to local manufacturers and the growing worker's movement in Key West and Ybor City. The majority of Cubans in Southern Florida were eager to listen to the Cuban luminary but some still viewed his visits with skepticism. Upon entering one factory in Ybor City, many of the workers remained seated in an act of disrespect. Upon seeing this, the fiery Paulina Pedroso who was with Martí stood on a table and shouted: "Gentlemen, if any of you are scared to give your money or to revolt, give me your trousers and you can have my skirt."⁵³ If Martí was to win over the workers of Southern Florida, he needed to assure them that his goals were shared and inclusive of worker demands. During his Christmas visit to Key West, he made sure to speak with Enrique Messonier and other local anarchists to assure them that the interests of Cuban independence were in line with the goals of workers.⁵⁴ He made similar overtures in Ybor City, and his speech dedicated "To All and for the Good of All" was an attempt to assure skeptical Cubans of the role of labor in the independence movement. Indeed, in addition to Messonier, other influential anarchists in the Caribbean South such as Enrique Creci, Ramon Rivero y Rivero, and Carlos Baliño eventually sided with Martí. In one of the most important developments in this shift, the radical *Congreso Regional Cubano* of 1892 met in Cuba and declared in its manifesto that "The working masses of Cuba will not and cannot come to be an obstacle to the triumph of the people's aspirations for

⁵³ Oscar Roca, *El Tabaco Cubano: Los Tabaqueros y su Cooperacion a la Liberacion de Cuba*, 9. Special Collections, University of South Florida. Tony Pizzo Collection, Box 26, Folder Cuba; Francisco Rodriguez Sr., interview by Fred Beaton and Otis Anthony, 12-13.

⁵⁴ Oscar Roca, *Los Tabaqueros de Cayo Hueso*, 7. Special Collections, University of South Florida. Tony Pizzo Collection, Box 50, Folder Key West.

emancipation, because it would be absurd that a person who aspires to individual liberty would oppose the collective liberty of a people, even though the collective liberty desired is that of emancipation from the tutelage of another people.”⁵⁵ This settled an important debate and Martí now had the cooperation of the anarchist leadership in Cuba and Southern Florida. The émigré networks became even more important in the short term, because labor activity was greatly stifled following the Congreso Regional Cubano with the Spanish government closing *El Productor*, persecuting union members, and barring worker meetings on the island. With this in mind, many labor activists understood that in order for additional labor activity to occur, they would first have to break their shackles from the Spanish Empire.

Another major concern of Martí’s was the creation of a movement that viewed Cubans of color as central to Cuban independence. Although the emancipation of slaves was gained as part of the independence movement, equality was far from reach. His concept of “for all, and for the good of all,” was purposefully malleable and meant to include groups that had been traditionally cast aside to the margins in Cuban history. During his Tampa lecture in Ybor, he posited:

“Should we fear the Cuban of color, the generous black Cuban, the black Cuban brother... Well, I know black Cubans who are more virtuous than any whites I know; I know the black Cuban love for prudent freedom... Others fear him, I love him. To he who speaks poorly of him, disregarding me, I say to him openly: ‘They lie!’”⁵⁶ Martí made sure to foster a close relationship with the aforementioned Paulina Pedroso. Martí stayed in the home of Paulina and Ruperto Pedroso, a prominent black Cuban family, each of the twenty times he visited Ybor City. In Key West, he made similar overtures. Before he left after his first visit, he met personally with Cornelio Brito

⁵⁵ Fernandez, 28-29.

⁵⁶ Martí, 270.

and Bruno Roig.⁵⁷ Similarly, Martí had for some time been in contact with Martín Morúa Delgado and assured him and others of his dedication to the race question and the full integration of black Cubans in the independence movement.⁵⁸ Later, Martí's network of émigré communities possessed several black Cubans who played instrumental roles in organizing local revolutionary clubs and writing revolutionary literature—Cornelio Brito and Rafael Serra y Montalvo were two prime examples.

With the major divisions settled, Martí went about forming an inclusive network that would lead to an insurrection. The Cuban Revolutionary Party (PRC) was founded by Martí in Ybor City in 1892. Its purpose was to coordinate financing and information between the United States' Cuban population and the revolutionary insurgency in Cuba. Using patriotic clubs, Cubans pledged their financial support to the revolutionary cause throughout the war. It was common to have cigar workers donating about 10% of their salary to the movement.⁵⁹ The aforementioned *Dias de la Patria* were set aside to have cigar workers donate one day's worth of wages to the Cuban Revolutionary Party. Additionally, writers such as Ramon Rivera and Nestor Leonelo Carbonell created numerous newspapers and magazines galvanizing support for Cuban independence. Just as literary circles were critical to communicating during the Ten Years War, the 1890s renewed the proliferation of nationalist publications through émigré centers. With the organization set up, Martí went on to form an allegiance with Antonio Maceo and Maximo

⁵⁷ Roca, *El Tabaco Cubano: Los Tabaqueros y su Cooperacion a la Liberacion de Cuba*, 7.

⁵⁸ Ronning, 33-34.

⁵⁹ Barbara Johnson, "Origin of the Partido Revolucionario Cubano in Tampa; Marti and the Tobacco Workers" (MA thesis, University of Florida, 1968), 39-40.

Gomez. With Martí as the leader of the PRC, Maceo and Gomez would command the Cuban forces for the final war of Cuban independence.

A Revolution Fulfilled

Jose Delgado was neutral in a war with little patience for such a designation. Born in Cuba, he lived in the United States from 1856 to 1877 where he became a physician and an American citizen. He eventually returned to Cuba, where he helped on his father's sugar plantation—the farm, titled *Dolores*, was about 30 miles southeast of Havana in Bainoa. Delgado's life was bucolic but during the War of Cuban Independence, it was difficult for any Cuban to escape the violence of the conflict. On March 4th, 1896, that violence arrived on Delgado's doorstep. Antonio Maceo arrived at Dolores alongside several thousand insurgents. Maceo was courteous. He informed Delgado that his troops were passing through and needed to stop at his farm to eat breakfast. Manuel, looking to navigate this delicate situation, produced his citizenship papers and explained that he had no direct involvement in the conflict. Maceo assured him that he was there on peaceful terms and would soon be gone. While eating, Maceo's troops were startled by a series of volleys sent in their direction—with the Spanish in sight, Maceo and his men quickly fled. Cayetano Melguizo and his troops arrived with the suspicion that Manuel was housing the insurgency. When Melguizo began to question Delgado, the American produced his citizenship papers once again. Melguizo quipped that “Just as I will shoot you, so would I shoot the American consul. I care nothing for all those papers of American citizenship.”⁶⁰

⁶⁰ United States Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States with the Annual Message of the President Transmitted to Congress*, December 7, 1896. Committee Print, 587.

Dating back to the insurgency's infancy, the Spanish used acts of barbarism as a way of intimidating the Cuban population and punishing potential revolutionary sympathizers. Here, Delgado and his workmen would be made an example of. He and six laborers on the farm were tied to one another with a rope. Manuel's elderly father was spared and ordered to stay with the women on the farm. The men were led away and placed against a wall. First, each man was dealt several blows from Spanish machetes. Then, the firing squad paced back and looked to finish the job with their rifles. The volleys ensued with each man tumbling to the ground. Venancio Pino, a 68 year old laborer, was shot four times but remained conscious. A bullet grazed Manuel's scalp and he tumbled as well, hoping to look dead. With the soldiers hovering over him, they noticed that Manuel was still breathing. The Spaniards were commanded to finish the job with their machetes. A massive blow was delivered to Manuel's neck and he was left for dead. Pino, remarkably, lived. One bullet to his shoulder led to the eventual amputation of his right arm but he managed to lumber back towards the farm house and Manuel's father. Jose Gregorio Delgado immediately pleaded to Pino to know what happened. Pino remarked: "They have killed them all." Delgado's father walked out expecting to find his son's corpse but instead found him clinging to life. Gregorio hid his son in a cane field and nursed him back to health. He had to hide him because the Spanish authorities caught wind of his improbable survival. In a heated exchange with the American Consulate, Spanish officials denied all wrongdoing and blamed the insurgency. Following endless correspondence, a series of depositions, and some very shrewd diplomacy from the American consulate, Manuel was eventually placed in American care and returned to the United States.⁶¹

⁶¹ Ibid, 619-620.

A great deal happened in the three short years of the Cuban War of Independence. Delgado's story is a mere snapshot of an incredibly violent war that reshaped émigré communities, Cuba, and the future of Spanish-American relations. For the Cubans of Key West and Ybor City, the war symbolized an end to a conflict waged over generations. No one represented this better than the 20-year old Oscar de Cespedes. A reporter for the *Key West Herald*, he was sent to Cuba in 1896 to cover the war where he was eventually imprisoned by the Spanish military.⁶² Given his lineage, Cespedes could hardly be surprised. 28 years before, his grandfather, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes delivered his *Grito de Yara* and began the Ten Years War. Oscar's father, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes y Céspedes, was elected mayor of Key West in 1875 when the island town was being transformed into a hub for Cuban revolutionaries. While Céspedes represented a notable family, many émigrés in Southern Florida shared their history of struggle and dedication to Cuban independence. During the Cuban War of Independence, Ybor City and Key West were affected by the volatility of the Clear Havana industry and the urge to travel to Cuba and join the war. In Southern Florida, the Clear Havana industry was at the whim of various disruptions. The amount of available labor fluctuated by the month and a Spanish-imposed embargo nearly brought the industry to collapse. The war represented another period where the cigar industry took a back seat to the immediate needs of the independence movement.

The Clear Havana industry was at the whim of various factors, many of which manufacturers could not control. To begin, there was a great deal of instability in the Cuban tobacco and cigar industry. At times, the Clear Havana industry benefitted from Cuba's misfortune. In looking at a particularly busy period of Clear Havana production in 1898, one trade journal noted that "I attribute this increase to the falling off in the importation of Havana

⁶² Ibid, 662-669.

cigars. Last year there were about 40,000,000 cigars imported from Havana. So far there have been but few, and none are coming now, and will not for a long time yet, perhaps.”⁶³ However, during other periods, Southern Florida’s Clear Havana was greatly disrupted by the actions of the Spanish crown and fluctuations in labor. General Valeriano Weyler served as the Spanish governor of Cuba during most of the Cuban War of Independence. Reckless and ruthless, Weyler became the prime villain of the conflict and was referred to as “The Butcher” by the Hearst press in the United States. Weyler installed an embargo in 1896 regarding the export of Cuban tobacco. In his pronouncement Weyler claimed that “The difficult condition of the cigar industry in this capital because of the constant burning of raw material and the daily destruction of the factors of production by the rebels and enemies of property and the opponents of good citizenship and the public peace compels the adoption of energetic measures. If this is not done speedily it will bring the tobacco industry into a condition still more critical.”⁶⁴ Needless to say, response was swift from the Clear Havana industry. With less than two weeks between the announcement and the embargo being put into effect, manufacturers responded first by trying to get as much tobacco as possible off of the island. Henry Plant’s *Olivette* and *Mascotte*, typically used as the preferred steamships to travel between Cuba and Southern Florida, essentially became cargo ships. In May of 1896, bare bones crews traveled to Cuba with the ship packed to the brim, tobacco leaves bursting out of the dining rooms and cabins.⁶⁵ The Spanish population in Ybor City was particularly upset with Weyler’s decision. Days after the announcement, “almost the entire Spanish population of Tampa forwarded a vigorous protest to Madrid against

⁶³ *Tobacco Leaf*, June 1, 1898.

⁶⁴ *United States Tobacco Journal*, May 23, 1896.

⁶⁵ Roca, *El Tabaco Cubano: Los Tabaqueros y su Cooperacion a la Liberacion de Cuba*, 12.

the enforcement of the edict.”⁶⁶ Their efforts to lobby the Spanish government extended well into 1897 and showed that for many Spanish émigrés, their material reality was more important than Spain’s fragile hold on Cuba.⁶⁷

The Clear Havana work force also oscillated greatly from 1895-1898. Given that many cigarmakers became combatants during the war, the industry had to hire less experienced workers and suffer through periods of underemployment. Late in the war, a *Tobacco Leaf* report noted that “Good cigarmakers are extremely scarce...Several hundred good men left their tables to enlist with the Cuban volunteers, and their places are not yet filled in some of the factories.”⁶⁸ Fulfilling promises made to Martí, this was true of many radical workers as well. Leading by example, Enrique Creci was one of the first. Aside from founding *El Esclavo*, which was dedicated to serving as a propaganda paper for independence, he himself fought and died in Matanzas in 1896 from machete wounds.⁶⁹ As Tampa became one of the major hubs for filibuster expeditions, more and more Cubans poured into the port town. A typical article during this period noted that “The enlistment of Cuban soldiers here this week has made quite a stir in the cigar factories. About 300 unmarried men enlisted, and 600 or 700 more have arrived from Key West, Jacksonville, New York and other cities.”⁷⁰

The swings in the cigar industry were readily apparent in nearly every industry in Key West and Ybor City. The influx of American troops near the end of the war meant new business

⁶⁶ *United States Tobacco Journal*, May 23, 1896.

⁶⁷ *Tobacco Leaf*, April 6, 1897.

⁶⁸ *Tobacco Leaf*, June 8, 1898.

⁶⁹ Fernandez, 34.

⁷⁰ *Tobacco Leaf*, May 11, 1898.

when things were going well and a public health hazard in other moments. An American military presence could swell the population in a city very quickly—a six-week period in 1898 boosted Tampa’s population from 25,000 to over 60,000.⁷¹ This meant big business for restaurants, banks, and stores. However, the flood of soldiers also led to a deterioration of general hygiene and with ill soldiers regularly traveling back from Cuba, Southern Florida also became a site of several outbreaks. In particular, typhoid and yellow fever was oftentimes contracted by soldiers recovering in Southern Florida.⁷² The prevalence of disease was a broader problem in the war. In nearly every respect, the émigré communities of Southern Florida were altered by the war.

The “Splendid Little War” was anything but for the Spanish and Cuban participants. Less than 4,000 Spanish soldiers passed away in battle with estimates of about 5,000 for the Cuban side. The real killers of the Cuban War of Independence were from disease and the treatment of the civilian population. The Spanish army was completely ravaged by illness. Their military advantage, 5 to 1 against the Cuban side, was hampered by the fact that 41,288 soldiers perished due to disease. A combination of malaria, typhoid, dysentery, and several other diseases were the culprit.⁷³ As bad as the Spanish losses were, they were a pittance compared to the treatment of the civilian population. Spanish and Cuban sides were guilty of acts of barbarism against the civilian population on the island. However, no policy was more devastating to Cubans than the Spanish reconcentration policy. In 1897, General Weyler authorized the military to forcefully relocate the largely rural population of several Cuban provinces to enclosed areas protected by

⁷¹ *Tobacco Leaf*, June 8, 1898.

⁷² *New York Times*, August 2, 1898; August 17, 1898; August 19, 1898.

⁷³ John Lawrence Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba, 1895-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 9.

the military. The consequences were dire. The new war towns were shoddily supplied and assembled. As a result, an unprecedented number of Cubans passed away due to illness and starvation. Estimates vary but a more recent study posited that 170,000 Cubans passed away in these camps, equating to “one-tenth of the island’s population, a proportion comparable to Russia’s losses in World War II.”⁷⁴

For Cubans, the war of Cuban Independence came at great cost in nearly every respect. Many of the country’s great leaders perished in the war. Martí, the prime architect, was killed at the outset of the war in 1895. Maceo, the symbol of racial unity for the insurgency, passed away the following year in Punta Brava. Maximo Gomez became the only one of the three major architects to have lived through the war. Moreover, Martí’s death led to more conservative forces heading the PRC and the general direction of the Cuban insurgency. Led by men like Tomas Estrada Palma and Juan Bellido de Luna, the insurgency became increasingly friendly to the concept of American intervention; an idea Martí was sharply opposed to.⁷⁵ With the explosion of the *Maine*, American intervention was all but guaranteed. The Americans soon joined the war effort with no clear acknowledgement of the insurgency as a legitimate political entity. It was not until four years after the war in 1902 when Teddy Roosevelt swore in President Estrada and declared that “On this day, the government of the island of Cuba by the military authority of the United States ceases, and the control of the government is, by my direction, transferred to you, as the constituted authority under and by virtue of the elections held under your constitution. The occupation of the island of Cuba by the United States is hereby declared at an end.”⁷⁶ The

⁷⁴ Ibid, 8.

⁷⁵ Poyo, 114-117.

⁷⁶ *Morning Tribune*, May 21, 1902.

promise was tenuous and decades of American intervention persisted in Cuba. As Frank Fernandez noted, “After 30 years of struggle for independence, Cuba shifted from the yoke of Spanish colonialism to that of Yankee imperialism.”⁷⁷

Conclusion

From 1886 to 1898, the Cuban communities of Southern Florida undertook their most ambitious efforts towards organizing for the independence movement and for worker’s rights. The latter was the result of a gradual effort propelled by both international developments and coalitions built on the local level in the cigar factories of Key West and Ybor City. Locally, Key West and Ybor City cigar workers began to move from uncoordinated activity that typically varied by factory to a more centralized model that was open to the idea of labor unions city-wide actions. This was aided by the wave of radicalism spreading in both cigar centers. Cuba, while at odds with the Spanish crown, began to embrace many of the ideas of Spanish anarchism. Just as Havana’s cigar unions moved from a reformist model to a more activist union model, the labor unions of Key West and Ybor City began to do the same. These changes were even more fundamental in Ybor City due its ethnic diversity. There, Spanish and Italian workers were also powerful minorities in the town’s Clear Havana factories. The Spaniards and Italians brought with them the nascent radical ideas present in the works of Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin. As a result, a more militant form of organizing took hold in Ybor City that situated the worker as the central unit to understanding political change in the late nineteenth century.

Working-class organizations and independence groups clashed but ultimately negotiated their differences by the end of the nineteenth century. In the earlier years of Key West’s Cuban

⁷⁷ Fernandez, 38.

communities, an informal alliance existed between manufacturers and workers. Workers certainly had grievances but they looked to resolve these differences through mutual interest with manufacturers. In this early period, the prospect of Cuban independence hung over Key West and served as a deterrent to major clashes between capital and labor. This was decidedly less appealing to the radicalized cigar workers of the 1880s. It was at this point that many workers began to wonder if independence would bring substantive change to the material condition of the average Cuban. Some unionized workers went as far as to argue that the independence movement was being used as a mere distraction to keep workers from demanding better wages and working conditions. It took the considerable diplomatic skills of José Martí to bring together the various constituencies represented by Cuba's émigré communities. Martí was well aware that the labor movement was able to organize groups that too often had been at the margins of the independence movement: workers, women, and Cubans of color. Martí began the process of founding the *Partido Revolucionario Cubano* that tied together the various émigré communities of the United States and couched his vision of independence as a broad coalition that would work diligently to include workers, women, and black Cubans. Successfully recruiting many of the labor movement's organizers, Martí was able to spur the final push towards independence that resulted in the Cuban War of Independence.

There was obvious joy at the end of the war but it was unclear what this would mean for the Clear Havana centers of Southern Florida. Many Cubans soon declared an end to their exile and returned to Cuba. However, many cigarmakers in particular realized that there were few prospects in the immediate wake of the war. The tobacco growing region of Pinar del Rio was decimated and Havana was also still reeling from the violence that had fallen on the city. In many ways, Southern Florida continued to provide the stability that was elusive in Cuba. With

this in mind, cigarmakers in Southern Florida soon decided to stay permanently and focus on improving their towns as residents. Cubans in Southern Florida maintained very close relations with the island but with the war over, their concerns turned inward and focused on reclaiming their position as the major production centers of Clear Havana cigars. With this in mind, Cubans returned to the activity that dominated their time in periods of peace: labor organizing. Following the War of Cuban Independence, the cigarmakers of Southern Florida organized their largest labor unions and won their most substantive labor battles. A vigorous war soon began that pitted workers against the manufacturers and power brokers of Southern Florida.

Chapter 3 - Radical Unionism and Vigilantism, 1898-1910

Introduction

There is one photo that explains a great deal about Southern Florida and Caribbean cigarmakers in the early twentieth century. The photo is a rare image of a *lector* away from the cigar factory. The reader stares sternly at the camera wearing a light-colored linen suit, a square end tie, and a Panama hat tilted just slightly. The lector was in this case a *lectora*. Luisa Capetillo was an essayist, playwright, anarchist, labor organizer, reader, occasional cross-dresser, and perpetual agitator. In Ybor City, she fit right in. Capetillo's life represented the many political and intellectual currents that ran through Southern Florida's Clear Havana industry and Caribbean radical networks at the turn of the century. Capetillo was born to a wealthy Puerto Rican family and was radicalized at a young age by the works of Leo Tolstoy. Convinced that workers held the key to radical revolution, she dedicated her life to advancing the causes of anarchism and collective power. Her work led her to write and work in Ybor City, Havana, and New York City.¹

Capetillo's journey to Ybor City was by no means uncommon—it reflected the radical networks of the Caribbean and the height of organizing among Southern Florida's cigarmakers. In the nineteenth century, workers weighed their allegiances between Cuban independence and labor activism—this distinction became irrelevant after 1898. Over the next several years, Ybor City became the unquestionable hub of the Clear Havana industry in terms of both sheer output

¹ For more on Capetillo's life and work, see Norma Valle Ferrer, *Luisa Capetillo, Pioneer Puerto Rican Feminist* (New York: P. Lang, 2006); Luisa Capetillo and Felix Matos Rodriguez, *A Nation of Women: An Early Feminist Speaks Out* (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 2004).

and being at the forefront of the regional labor movement. Havana remained ravaged by the Cuban wars of independence; the city's continued instability hampered the ability of workers to organize effectively. Key West continued to be an important cigar city, but it was undoubtedly declining during this period as it began its long shift into a tourist economy. With these conditions, organizing efforts were largely focused on Ybor City—their crowning achievement was *La Resistencia*, a labor organization that represented the largest voluntary group in the state of Florida and served as an umbrella organization for workers of all trades in the Tampa Bay area, not just cigarmakers. Their efforts were met vigorously and violently by cigar manufacturers and local political figures. Strikes were frequent and the use of violence to stifle workers became a powerful weapon for city officials and manufacturers.

The violent suppression of workers was a common trope in early twentieth century America. In border towns throughout the United States, the use of state-sponsored violence became a way to curb radicalism and tame diverse working-class populations. This happened in Ludlow, Colorado where battles between striking coal miners and business interests famously culminated in the Ludlow Massacre of 1914.² Similarly, the multiethnic miners of Bisbee, Arizona were victims of vigilante justice that mirrored the experience of Southern Florida's cigarmakers. There, over 1,000 radical workers aligned with the Industrial Workers of the World

² For more on the Ludlow Massacre, see Thomas Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); George McGovern, *The Great Coalfield War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972).

were forcefully deported from Arizona by representatives of the Phelps Dodge Corporation.³ Tampa became a breeding ground for similar clashes between labor and capital. Robert Ingalls' work on Tampa has explained the long history of state-sponsored violence in South Florida and how armed vigilantes worked with a variety of groups to limit the power of ethnic groups and labor unions.⁴ This chapter adds to this discussion by showing how the anti-radicalism movement in the United States, which peaked during World War I, was readily apparent in the cigar centers of Southern Florida at the turn of the century.

Another important aspect of this period is the role of the American Federation of Labor and its tobacco union, the Cigarmakers International Union (CMIU). At the outset of the twentieth century, manufacturers found an unlikely ally with the AFL affiliate. The CMIU had for many years attempted to establish itself in Key West and Ybor City. Their efforts were rebuffed at every turn as the largely Cuban work force strongly preferred unions that reflected the Caribbean radicalism of the late nineteenth century and had little interest in the collective bargaining emphasis of the AFL. This was hardly surprising given the AFL's poor record of representing black workers, women, and immigrants. Just as La Resistencia was waging its largest campaigns, the AFL was actively lobbying to bring back the Chinese Exclusion Act. William Preston has shown that the AFL was largely concerned with the "aristocratic fringe of skill" and largely focused on organizing white men and sharply opposing the influence of radical

³ For more on the Bisbee Deportations, see Katherine Benton-Cohen, *Borderline Americans: Racial Division and Labor War in the Arizona Borderlands* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 198-238; Eric Arnesen, *Encyclopedia of U.S. Labor and Working-Class History* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 155-156.

⁴ Robert P. Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes in the New South: Tampa, 1882-1936* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988).

ideology.⁵ Scholars have typically illustrated this point by charting the AFL's battles with the IWW, but their approach to the Cuban workers of Southern Florida speaks to the same paternalism and xenophobia that plagued the relationship between the AFL and other immigrant workers. Nevertheless, as one of the largest cigar-producing regions in the United States, the CMIU recognized the importance of including Clear Havana workers in their union. They persistently battled against La Resistencia and were the ultimate beneficiaries of La Resistencia's downfall in 1901 when business interests in Tampa violently suppressed the union. The CMIU stepped into the vacuum left by La Resistencia and began organizing a coalition of Anglo, Spanish, Italian, and Cuban workers by 1902. They steadily increased their membership rolls and began a long-term campaign to gain union recognition in Southern Florida. By 1910, another general strike was called—it produced thousands of striking workers, fierce in-fighting, and the last lynching in the history of Tampa.

Making Amends and Reorganizing

Following the conclusion of the War of Cuban Independence, Ybor City's focus shifted to more local concerns. One of the first issues involved ameliorating relations between Spanish loyalists and Cubans. José Martí had already laid the groundwork for this possibility during the 1890s. As Martí had repeatedly noted, the war for Cuban independence was a war against the Spanish crown and not against the Spanish people. Following the end of Cuban War of Independence, prominent Spaniards in Ybor City, led by Ignacio Haya, met with Tampa's city council. Haya, in fear of outbursts of violence from the Cuban immigrants, requested for formal

⁵ William Preston, *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903-1933* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 37.

protection of Ybor's Spanish citizens. Fernando Figueredo, Chief of the Cuban Revolutionary Party, approached Haya afterwards and assured him that hostilities would not take place against their Spanish neighbors. Figueredo's greatest wish "was that more cordial relations be established among the members of the Spanish-speaking colony, considering that they all worked side by side in the same tobacco factories and that they struggled together to support themselves and their families."⁶ This early treatise was one of many overtures that pointed to the collaboration that followed between Cubans and Spaniards. By 1902, when the United States removed its military presence from Cuba, the Cuban Independence Wars seemed like a distant memory. At a flag raising ceremony in Tampa, Vicente Guerra, a representative from the Spanish Consulate was present. In his speech to the crowd of jubilant Cubans, he noted that "Spain, the mother of the Cuban people, must naturally take pleasure in their independence, and watch with interest their career as a separate nation."⁷ With these settlements in place, Cubans and Spaniards could unite in common cause as workers.

The positions of Havana and Key West were more tenuous following the Cuban War of Independence. Much of Cuba's economy was sluggish following the independence wars and the cigar industry was no exception. The state of the industry coupled with the general instability in Cuba made returning to Cuba unpalatable for many Clear Havana workers. Many Cubans were eager to return to the island but encountered great difficulty in finding work. For the few that were able to secure positions, they often "abandoned the job when they found out that the living standards and the working conditions that prevailed in Cuba were far below those which they

⁶ José Rivero Muñiz, "Los Cubanos en Tampa," *Revista Bimestre Cubana* 74 (January-June 1958): 118.

⁷ *Morning Tribune*, October 28, 1902.

were accustomed to...⁸ Jose Ramon Sanfeliz, who was raised in Havana and learned the cigar trade there, echoed a similar sentiment. When he went to Havana in 1899 during an Ybor City strike, he recalled: “I also left for Cuba with my wife and children. In August of the same year, my wife returned with the children. I, myself, came back the following week. We found that we could no longer endure life in Cuba as we had become accustomed to a life of comfort and ease in Ybor City which we could not find in Cuba.”⁹ This instability greatly harmed the relationship between workers in Southern Florida and Havana. During the 1880s, during some of the more fruitful collaborations between the two sides, they generally dealt with each other as equals. Early in the twentieth century, Havana’s cigar workers grew more desperate. Labor leaders in Havana and Southern Florida increasingly differed over regional strategy and many Havana workers became willing to serve as strikebreakers.

Key West suffered from a different set of problems. Their demise had been long foretold as Ybor City grew to be a much larger cigar center that offered manufacturers more flexibility in regards to work force and the shipment of goods. In 1895, one writer commenting on another manufacturer moving from Key West to Ybor City noted that “Pretty soon the strip of sand will be almost a desert...Precisely what fate is in store for poor old Key West needs no prophet of the first magnitude to foretell.”¹⁰ Key West’s stagnant growth was largely the product of its 2x4 mile geography. It is instructive to note that dating back to 1910, the island has continually fluctuated between 20 and 25,000 residents—the island cannot comfortably support more people. Just as

⁸ José Rivero Muñiz, *El Movimiento Obrero Durante La Primera Intervencion* (Santa Clara: Universidad Central de las Villas, 1961), 17.

⁹ Jose Ramon Sanfeliz, Folklore Project, Life Histories, Works Progress Administration, 1935, 4.

¹⁰ *United States Tobacco Journal*, January 5, 1895.

with Havana, these changes did not weaken Key West to the point of irrelevance. Key West cigarmakers were still critically important and remained active in labor organizing. However, the identity of the island was well underway by the beginning of the twentieth century. By the time the Florida East Railway was connected to Key West in 1912, the island was noticeably moving from working class town to vacation destination for northeastern families.

The Weight Strike

Almost immediately after Cuban independence, workers in Southern Florida began a new wave of organizing. With no more need for revolutionary committees and *dias de la patria*, organizers were free to create the types of labor organizations they were dissuaded from making by nationalists in the 1880s and 1890s. Just as before, the dissemination of information and the use of both informal and formal education played a critical role in the development of these organizations. The lector in particular was more important than ever and became an essential cog in the dissemination of information regarding international labor movements and radical ideology. This was buttressed by the creation of labor schools and other forms of popular entertainment that were centered on the challenges and aspirations of the working class. It was in this climate that organizing in Ybor City was especially robust and successful. Thousands of workers became engaged with working-class causes and began to challenge the rule of cigar manufacturers. The successful organization of cigar workers would be tested in 1899. The Weight Strike of that year spoke to both the growing militarism among Clear Havana workers and their dedication to controlling the customs of their workplace.

The institution of the lector took a decidedly radical turn during the post-independence period. The lector of the nineteenth century took turns mixing classic literature with the many Cuban independence publications through the émigré communities of the United States. Some of

the more radical publications of Havana and Southern Florida were also read, but like most things during this period, they took a backseat to concerns over Cuban independence. After 1898, the lector became an institution that was inherently antagonistic to the needs and demands of the cigar manufacturer. They still typically read classic works in the afternoon, but the morning readings became increasingly tinged towards the local and regional radical publications that were readily available. An observer of Ybor's cigar factories noted that materials "included those of Gorky, Marx, Malatesta, and Tolstoi. Among the popular periodicals was the Tampa unions' paper, *El Internacional*; *Despertad* (Awaken), published in Key West and said to have been communistic; *El Machete* (The Cutlass) also reportedly communistic; *Aurora* (Dawn), socialist; *Tierra y Libertad* (Land and Liberty), an anarchist paper published in Barcelona." The writer expressed with wonderment that "the cigarmakers are able to speak the language proficiently, employing extensive vocabularies, and yet are unable to read or write it."¹¹ This is an overstatement as most cigarworkers were literate but it does underscore the broader point that the lector during this period imparted a sense of political and cultural awareness to members of the working class—first-hand accounts confirm as much. One female cigarmaker recalled that in addition to being well-informed on politics and current events, "We used to vote on what books we wanted to hear...My favorite was *Camille*."¹² The son of another female cigarmaker noted about the lector, "It was interesting because it would produce all kinds of anomalies. See if you could imagine a woman like my mother who only went to third grade and yet she was acquainted

¹¹ *Cubans in Florida: Origins, Migrations, Industry, Unions* (Federal Writers' Project of the Work Projects Administration for the State of Florida), 16.

¹² *Miami Herald*, July 24, 1972.

with such novels as *Les Miserables*.¹³ The lector then was a critically important institution in that it linked the literary and the political. In this context, the lector was instrumental in creating cosmopolitan figures out of working-class laborers from the obscure and little-known towns of Southern Florida.

Labor radicalism was further embedded through the use of labor schools and popular theater. The use of labor schools had its history in nineteenth-century Havana. Remembering his work as a child, one cigarmaker remembered: “In the afternoon when I was through with work, I would go home, eat, and then go to night school. This school which I attended was known as the ‘Centro de Artesanos de La Habana.’ At that time this was a sort of Labor Temple in which labor leaders met to discuss their different problems. They also held school at night and had some of the finest teachers in Havana.”¹⁴ The workers in Key West and Ybor City began to mimic these institutions in their own neighborhood. In Key West, *La Federacion* sponsored the creation of a labor school in 1900 that instructed cigarmakers English and Spanish—the ultimate goal was to make the school compulsory for apprentices so that no cigarmaker would be illiterate.¹⁵ Similar efforts were undertaken by the ethnic societies of Ybor City. These schools became essential to creating communities in Southern Florida that were self-reliant and focused on the material concerns of the local workforce.

¹³ Francisco Rodriguez Jr., interview by Fred Beaton and Otis Anthony, African Americans in Florida Project, Special Collections, University of South Florida, May 30, 1978, 12.

¹⁴ Jose Ramon Sanfeliz, 1.

¹⁵ *Florida Times Union*, January 29, 1900.

The same enthusiasm for working-class ideas began to be infused in Southern Florida's popular entertainment. The use of proletarian messages in local plays became especially popular. Cigarmakers in both Key West and Ybor City possessed several theaters that served as the major recreational outlets for workers—Key West boasted the San Carlos while Ybor City's possessed beautiful theatres in each of the neighborhood's ethnic centers. The aforementioned Capetillo was one such playwright that explored the issues of the working class in her many plays. Her plays, which she read as a lectora to Ybor's workers, centered on themes of class privilege, women's rights, and the dignity of everyday people. Her most famous work which was written in Ybor City was *Influencia de las Ideas Modernas*. Echoing themes of Ybor City and her own life, the play's protagonist is the daughter of a cigar manufacturer who becomes radicalized by the works of Tolstoy and Emile Zola and is set on a mission to create a more equitable society.¹⁶ Similarly, the *Circulo Cubano's* archive of plays are rich with stories of working-class themes that were intended to parallel the lives of contemporary workers. One example is Agustin Rodriguez's *El Triunfo del Obrero* which is centered on a group of striking workers that are organizing against an American employer. The play's emphasis on solidarity and hatred of strikebreakers were resonant themes that were evident in South Florida's plays throughout the early twentieth century—this was still true even when organizing became more difficult in the 1910s and 1920s.

These cultural markers were reflective of the organizing efforts that were taking place in both Key West and Ybor City. The use of the wildcat strike in particular continued to be a popular tool wielded by workers. These strikes were used to assert control over working conditions or the general treatment of workers. A typical example of this type of action occurred

¹⁶ Araceli Tinajero, *El Lector: A History of the Cigar Factory Reader* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 48.

in June of 1900 when an Italian cigarmaker was fired from the Sanchez & Haya factory. His fellow workers immediately called for a walk-out and demanded the reinstatement of the cigarmaker. Sure enough, the workers almost immediately secured the return of the worker and an additional raise which they had also been requesting.¹⁷ As effective as the wildcat strikes were, they still failed to address the industry-wide issues that plagued workers. In particular, the wages workers were paid for the production of cigars varied greatly by factory and cigar type. Workers had long clamored for a general scale to be applied to Southern Florida and workers began to understand that this could only be accomplished with a strong central union.

The Weight Strike of 1899 was instrumental to the growth of a central labor union and led to the eventual founding of *La Resistencia*. In tow with late nineteenth century trends on industry efficiency, tobacco manufacturers attempted to implement weight scales in factories. New regulations outlined that cigarmakers would be given a precise amount of tobacco to be filled in each cigar. The scales were intended to ensure that rollers were producing the maximum number of cigars per tobacco leaf. As one worker described the tack: “It had been the custom of the manufacturers to weigh out 8 or 9 ounces of filler tobacco, and the workers had to produce fifty cigars from this amount. It was practically impossible to produce the required number with this amount so we went on strike to eliminate the weighing of the material.”¹⁸ The proposed changes spurred nearly 4,000 tobacco workers to go on strike. The strike became a reason to bring up a slew of other charges against manufacturers. Uniform pay scales, union representation

¹⁷ *Tobacco Leaf*, June 13, 1900.

¹⁸ Domingo Ginesta, Folklore Project, Life Histories, Works Progress Administration, 1935, 2.

in the factories, operating hours, and general working conditions all became part of the rallying cry.

Regional support and the increasingly important role of female laborers were essential to the Clear Havana workers' strategy. In the short term, the relationship between Key West, Ybor City, and Havana remained strong. When the Weight Strike commenced in Ybor City, workers continued to use Key West and Havana as safety valves to lessen the burden of the strike.¹⁹ In early 1900, when cigarmakers in Havana were on strike, cigarmakers in Southern Florida went back to the habit of raising weekly funds for the purpose of supporting Havana's strike funds.²⁰ Another important development was the prominence of women in labor actions. In one respect, the largely segregated nature of cigar labor relegated women to low wage work. Conversely, factories were organized in *gremios*. With each gremio consisting of one group of workers, this provided each group with distinct power considering that when one gremio went on strike, other gremios were expected to collaborate and join in solidarity. As a result, gremios of stemmers often wielded considerable power. Aside from being instrumental in Ybor City's Weight Strike, they were also asserting power in Key West during this same period. In December of 1899, cigar stemmers in Eduardo Gato's factory went out on strike demanding a raise in their wages. Cigarmakers in the factory walked out in sympathy and the strike was settled within a week with raises installed in Gato's factory. Moreover, the strike led to raises for stemmers in nearby Key West factories as workers pressured manufacturers for standard rates across the city. The S. Falk & Son's factory voluntarily raised their rates to the same level so as to avoid labor unrest.²¹

¹⁹ Jose Ramon Sanfeliz, 4.

²⁰ *Florida Times Union*, February 17, 1900.

²¹ *Florida Times Union*, December 19, 1899.

Within a month, the cigar manufacturers ceded to the demands of the cigar makers. The victory was overwhelming and served as a referendum on worker strength. The scales being abolished was the obvious point but workers also won union presence in factories, uniform price scales, a new set of operating hours, and guarantees concerning the cleanliness of the factory.²² The strike's success was due to the breadth of its support. In addition to effectively organizing the city's cigarworkers, the strike also spurred sympathy and aid from the community. This connection between worker and community strength would be an essential element in future labor actions.

To ensure the preservation and improvement of the Clear Havana industry, Ybor's cigar makers founded *La Sociedad de Torcedores de Tabaco de Tampa* in the fall of 1899—the union became simply known as *La Resistencia*. Designed “with the intent of resisting the exploitation of capital,” *La Resistencia* promised to be the most ambitious organizing attempt made by the workers of Southern Florida.²³ The Weight Strike had been won without a formal union—the goal of *La Resistencia* was to create a movement that would serve as a permanent presence in Southern Florida. Within the cigar factory, members of *La Resistencia* were still traditionally organized by *gremios*. The guild of tobacco stemmers, composed almost entirely of women, was one of the largest in *La Resistencia*. In many cases, their vote decided the direction of *La Resistencia*'s labor activities.²⁴ *La Resistencia* soon broadened its membership by recruiting

²² *Tobacco Leaf*, August 23, 1899.

²³ *La Gaceta*, 1954. Special Collections, University of South Florida. Tony Pizzo Collection, Box 73, Folder Resistencia.

²⁴ Nancy Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort: Women's Activism in Tampa, Florida, 1880s-1920s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 120.

members across trade. The union included “not only the cigar makers and the other branches of labor employed in and about cigar factories, but a number of allied trades such as clerks, cooks, waiters, bakers, bartenders, porters, draymen, laundry workers, etc.—in fact, all classes of help that are employed in places of business that derive their support from the Resistencia.”²⁵ The inclusive nature of *La Resistencia* was congruent with its radical critiques of capitalism. A union organized solely by skilled trade was often limited to “bread and butter” concerns over wages and working conditions. An industrial union, like *La Resistencia*, worked towards broader goals that concerned the Latin community and all of its laborers. Boasting over 5,000 members by 1901, *La Resistencia* was viewed by Tampa residents as “the giant” of labor organizations and “the most powerful influence in the city today, and, considered numerically, is the strongest organization in the State of Florida.”²⁶

Manufacturers were seething over the loss of the Weight Strike and the creation of *La Resistencia*. Their lack of organization and coordination led to a fractured response that ultimately failed. Previous attempts had been made to organize manufacturers in Southern Florida. In the late nineteenth century, manufacturers began to form informal affiliations with other factories. An 1897 article reported on an effort “by the manufacturers to organize against strikes, or at least to protect themselves from unnecessary annoyances from disagreements for trivial causes.”²⁷ As late as early 1899, there were rumblings of a region wide organization. An 1899 article talked about “a proposed syndicate, with the object of absorbing all the clear Havana factories in Tampa and Key West.” Making the transition from competitor to ally was clearly

²⁵ *Morning Tribune*, July 27, 1901.

²⁶ *Morning Tribune*, July 23, 1901.

²⁷ *Tobacco Leaf*, March 3, 1897.

difficult for many manufacturers. M.F. Garcia, one such manufacturer, angrily proclaimed that this division spoke to the strength of the workers and the relative weakness of manufacturers. Lamenting the recent gains made by workers in 1900, he noted that “The manufacturers have to submit to all of these demands, and why? By reason of the lack of unity and petty jealousy which exist among themselves, and their failure to realize that sooner or later they will be compelled to close their factories and leave the locality; for it is absolutely impossible to keep order in the factories or get a cent more from the trade for the manufactured product.”²⁸ This time, manufacturers responded to the call. With workers organizing at an unprecedented rate, they needed new tactics. Manufacturer cooperation, strikebreaking, alliances with the local press, and outright vigilantism became the new tools of the trade.

American Labor and Its Discontents

Ybor City’s Weight Strike of 1899 drew the interest of the broader labor movement in the United States. The Cigar Makers International Union (CMIU), the largest cigar union in the country, was especially observant. The CMIU understood that the growing importance of Ybor City’s booming cigar industry meant that they were a valuable asset to the CMIU’s national coalition. However, the CMIU’s principals were inherently at odds with the Cuban brand of radical organizing. The CMIU recruited by trade, and full membership was limited to white men. Following their fourth national convention in 1867, the CMIU extended membership to blacks and women, but they were limited to second-class status that barred them from convention representation and voting. Depending on the region, certain CMIU unions continued to ban blacks and women from their organizations. Additionally, the American union was uneasy with

²⁸ *Tobacco Leaf*, September 26, 1900.

the foreign nature of Ybor City's cigar factories. The American Federation of Labor (AFL), firmly aligned with the CMIU, had a long history of calling for restricted immigration practices.²⁹ The CMIU claimed that Southern Florida's labor organizations were "foreign in its origins, foreign in race, foreign in tongue, and antagonistic to our laws, customs, and government."³⁰ *La Resistencia* grew increasingly hostile to the CMIU's overtures and conflicts between the two organizations were frequent from 1899 to 1901. The CMIU, in concert with tobacco trade journals that sympathized with them, launched a campaign against *La Resistencia* that criticized the very nature of Southern Florida's cigarmakers as unfit for American labor.

The CMIU's Tampa union, Local 336, experienced numerous difficulties in organizing. Formed in 1892, Local 336 held very little influence in Ybor City. Prior to 1898, their organizing was erratic, and following the Cuban independence movement, the vast majority of tobacco workers sided with either *La Resistencia* or other short-lived Latin unions such as *La Liga Obrera de Tampa*. Members of *La Resistencia* rebuked the "absorbing leanings of the International Union."³¹ Latin workers understood that their broader critiques of capitalism and the factory would be marginalized in the CMIU. More generally, the AFL's checkered history in regards to immigrants and black workers heightened suspicion among Southern Florida's cigarmakers. *La Resistencia*, which "opens its doors to all men, whatever their provenance or color may be," was inherently at odds with American-style organizing.³² The CMIU, like the

²⁹ Eric Rauchway, *Blessed Among Nations: How the World Made America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 69.

³⁰ *Tobacco Leaf*, October 9, 1901.

³¹ *Morning Tribune*, November 27, 1900.

³² *La Gaceta*, 1954. Special Collections, University of South Florida. Tony Pizzo Collection, Box 73, Folder Resistencia.

AFL in general, focused on issues directly related to wages and working conditions. They also insisted on separating themselves from radical strains of labor organizing. The egalitarian ethos of groups like the Knights of Labor held little appeal to the skilled white work force of the CMIU. *La Resistencia*'s emphasis on radical politics and organizing across race and gender would be fundamentally altered under the CMIU. Nevertheless, following the successful weight strike of 1899, Local 336 attempted to extend its recruiting efforts in Ybor City.

Following *La Resistencia*'s various rebuffs, the CMIU, in concert with the major trade journals that supported them, waged a bitter campaign against Latin labor. Ybor's Latin work force was considered foreign, lazy, and antagonistic to the goals of the American labor movement. A tobacco report noted that while "the Latin race has some fine qualities...It does not allow for social, economic, or technological improvements that go with progress. It tends to tie the hands of the industry, insofar as keeping abreast of the times is concerned."³³ Implicit in the industry criticisms was that Latin workers needed the guidance of Anglo-American labor leadership. Moreover, Ybor's unions were propagating "anarchistic theories and applying them to our factories with a view to bringing about a social equalization."³⁴ As the AFL and CMIU would do throughout its history, it aligned itself as the rational alternative to foreign, radical unions. The Local 336 declared that "the order of La Resistencia was leveled alike at trade unions and business prosperity...the business interest can now perceive how their lot may be made similar to others who suffer equally but whose torture is more directly applied. La

³³ A. Stuart Campbell and W. Porter McLendon, *The Cigar Industry of Tampa, Florida* (Gainesville, 1939), 1.

³⁴ *Tobacco Leaf*, September 26, 1900.

Resistencia members are the executioners; the International Union and its branches are the victims.”³⁵

The CMIU’s criticism of Latin labor was inextricable from characterizations of Cubans during the Spanish American War and the general nativism that pervaded the AFL. The War of 1898 was often invoked to illustrate the lazy, ungrateful nature of Cubans. During the war, the American press portrayed Cubans as “harmless and lazy, you could see them sitting on the miniature verandas of their cottages, smoking cigars in company with their half-dressed wives and naked children.”³⁶ Given the city’s proximity to Cuba, many soldiers were stationed in Tampa before being deployed. Soldier accounts that were later published reflected a similar disdain for the Cubans of Ybor. One account proclaimed that “they were childlike, simple, and bland, honest and industrious from all accounts, but plainly incapable of self-government.”³⁷ Detailing the depraved nature of the Cubans was necessary in order to assert American authority over the island. Similarly, American unions used the war to underscore the questionable character of its Cuban (and by association, Latin) workers. The CMIU’s official journal noted that “one of the regrettable things connected with this affair is the fact that many of the Cubans whom this country went to war to liberate are with the scabby Rivero, and the adventurous gang of Spaniards who are now holding up American citizens.” The same article posited that “the men who are now engaged in striking this blow at American institutions are principally Cubans, for

³⁵ *Morning Tribune*, December 2, 1900.

³⁶ Joan Steffy, “The Cuban Immigrants of Tampa, Florida, 1886-1898” (Master's thesis, University of South Florida, 1975), 118.

³⁷ *The Spanish-American War: The Events of the War Described by Eye Witnesses* (Chicago: H.S. Stone, 1899), 15-16.

whose liberty America spent \$400,000,000 and sacrificed 9,000 lives.” Appealing to the most nativist of impulses, the article concludes by citing a stanza from “My Country, ‘Tis of Thee.”³⁸ In the view of the American labor movement, it was abhorrent enough that the Cubans were unhelpful during their own independence, but their obstinacy in Ybor was an affront to the American way.

The CMIU and trade journals viewed “Cracker labor”³⁹ as the solution to Latin labor’s monopoly in Southern Florida. Aware of the solidarity among Ybor’s cigar makers, Americans believed that the introduction of Anglo workers would fracture *La Resistencia*’s dominance in the factories. Many writers first combated the idea that the production of “Clear Havana” cigars truly required Latin workers that had been trained in its techniques. As one trade journal sarcastically noted, Ybor’s cigar workers were “all, to a man, either Spaniards or Cubans, no Americans or persons of other nationalities seemingly having the peculiar manual dexterity required to make these cigars.”⁴⁰ Following the growing antagonisms between the Local 336 and *La Resistencia*, the *Tobacco Leaf* argued that “the only possible solution of the present critical situation in Tampa is to dispense altogether with the services of their old hands and to break in and employ young American people exclusively to do the work in all departments of our

³⁸ *Cigar Makers’ Official Journal*, November 15, 1900.

³⁹ From the Florida Folklife WPA Collection: “The term ‘Cracker,’ while now more widely known as a derogatory term for rural whites, has a more specific--and less insulting--definition in Florida. The Florida Crackers are whites of Celtic descent who first settled South Florida around the mid-eighteenth century. Crackers usually migrated to the Florida Everglades from Alabama, Georgia, and the Carolinas, drawn to the fertile land for ranching and farming, and to the peninsula’s plentiful resources for fishing.”

⁴⁰ *United States Tobacco Journal*, January 19, 1889.

factories.”⁴¹ In the same vein, another *Tobacco Leaf* article argued that “the old claim that none but Cubans can learn to make clear Havana cigars is an exploded theory. Some of the best jobs in Clear Havana factories in Tampa are held down (and successfully too) by Florida crackers, born and raised within the radius of a few miles of Tampa.”⁴² The CMIU consistently referred to *La Resistencia* as a dictatorial organization that denied respectable white men positions inside Ybor’s cigar factories. This certainly played off historic tensions between Ybor’s Latins and Tampa’s Anglo population.

The battle between Latin and Anglo labor in Ybor City was central to labor strikes in 1900 and 1901. Throughout 1900, *La Resistencia* threatened to strike against cigar manufacturers unless owners observed the closed shop and excluded workers of the Local 336. The majority of Ybor’s factories ceded to *La Resistencia*’s demands with a few notable factories such as Sanchez and Haya refusing. Following the barring of many CMIU laborers, several AFL unions called for a sympathetic strike throughout Tampa. The strike drew over 3,000 workers from a variety of trades but was unsuccessful due to *La Resistencia*’s dominance in the cigar industry. The CMIU once again returned to nativist sentiment as a way of attracting the sympathy of Tampa’s Anglo population. After the CMIU’s protest, they published a statement noting that “The object of the sympathetic strike is to demonstrate and educate the Resistencia people of the deep love of liberty and the right to work under American institutions that exist in the hearts of our people.”⁴³ Nevertheless, the CMIU possessed only a sliver of the work force in the cigar industry, and the strike was doomed from the start. One particularly powerful display that illustrated this was

⁴¹ *Tobacco Leaf*, September 26, 1900.

⁴² *Tobacco Leaf*, March 7, 1906.

⁴³ *Morning Tribune*, November 27, 1900.

leveled by the cigar stemmers union of La Resistencia. In response to the CMIU's action, a group of female cigarmakers gathered in what the *Tampa Morning Tribune* called the "Greatest woman's meeting ever seen in Tampa..." The paper described this unique sight: "The hall was literally packed with women who work daily in this branch of the cigarmaking industry. There were Americans, Cubans, Spaniards and Italians in the mass of feminine toilers. All were arrayed under the banner of La Resistencia..."⁴⁴ Providing a sense of the disparity in power between the two unions, the stemmers union of La Resistencia represented 1,248 workers while the CMIU represented approximately 40.⁴⁵ The strike was lost for the CMIU but their attempts to siphon workers away from La Resistencia were only beginning.

The General Strike of 1901 and the Era of the Vigilante

After a few smaller strikes, the largest confrontation between La Resistencia and manufacturers occurred in July of 1901. Two cigar manufacturers, Gonzalez, Mora and Company and Cuesta, Rey and Company threatened to build branch factories in Jacksonville and Pensacola unless *La Resistencia* annulled its closed shop requirement. *La Resistencia's* workers went on a general strike on July 27th, 1901. The cigar manufacturers wasted little time replacing *La Resistencia's* workers with members of CMIU Local 336. When *La Resistencia* workers walked off the Cuesta, Rey and Company factory, "the company promptly employed fifty International Cigarmakers to take their places."⁴⁶ The CMIU also "recruited a small contingent of native-born white women" into the Local 336 "hoping that Anglo working women could replace their

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Long, 204.

recalcitrant Latin counterparts.”⁴⁷ In response, La Resistencia demanded that all strikebreakers be fired or “every man and woman who was affiliated with itself to go out on the streets and stay out until such time as their request was granted...”⁴⁸

Two days before the strike commenced, a meeting occurred between leaders of La Resistencia and the Tampa Board of Trade that underscored many of the themes that would play out over the following months. There, the workers made their demands clear. The CMIU and their continued nuisance was at the forefront. One representative noted that “We are tired of continual unrest and disturbance in the cigar manufacturing industry...These troubles are caused by a few men, claiming to be members of another union but whom we do not recognize as union men.” La Resistencia was demanding a closed shop system in Ybor City that recognized La Resistencia as the sole bargaining unit of the city’s cigarworkers. Resistencia leaders knew that their strength was dependent on cigarworkers speaking with one unified voice and that as long as the CMIU was present, antagonisms would rule the day and divide the broader efforts of workers—the manufacturers were keenly aware of this as well. In addition to the dismissal of the CMIU workers from Ybor City’s factories, La Resistencia also called for the close of the Cuesta branch that was opened in Pensacola. This too, La Resistencia argued, was a dishonest move intended to subvert the rights of workers in Southern Florida. In an ominous end to the meeting, Senor Pagis, a Resistencia representative, pleaded with the board that “We will promise, as a union...if we find it necessary to strike, to do so peaceably, and we ask the business men of

⁴⁷ Hewitt, 127.

⁴⁸ *United States Tobacco Journal*, July, 1901. Special Collections, University of South Florida. Tony Pizzo Collection, Box 73, Folder Resistencia.

Tampa, if they cannot help us, to at least occupy neutral ground.”⁴⁹ The business interests of Tampa were not interested in bargaining with Ybor City’s cigarworkers and they most certainly did not plan to stay neutral. They later met with the cigar manufacturers of the city and laid out an entirely different plan to the one proposed by the cigarmakers of La Resistencia.

With the manufacturers signaling that no changes would be made, La Resistencia took to the streets. On July 27, 5,000 La Resistencia members were on general strike and 30 factories were closed virtually paralyzing the largest Clear Havana center in the country.⁵⁰ La Resistencia took to the strike using the strategies that had repeatedly functioned for Southern Florida’s most radical labor organizations. Using a sizeable portion of their strike funds, nine soup houses were opened in order to feed the families of every striking cigarmaker.⁵¹ They also used their old networks to their advantage. Several days after the strike was announced, workers started moving north and south, with cigarmakers spread out to Key West, Havana, and New York to find work and continue to raise strike funds. The strike looked to be in La Resistencia’s favor. They ate up the vast majority of the city’s work force and were emboldened by having won their previous strikes.

Manufacturers and city officials began a calculated legal and extralegal response. The Tampa Manufacturers Association in alliance with major city officials, launched an unprecedented wave of oppressive action. Central to this development was the creation of a Citizens Committee. The committee, meant to reflect the alleged outrage of white locals, was staffed by deputized citizens, many of whom were not even from Tampa. Brandished with the

⁴⁹ *Morning Tribune*, July 25, 1901.

⁵⁰ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, December 27, 1953.

⁵¹ *Morning Tribune*, August 1, 1901.

authority of the police, their actions were often reckless and violent. This was made possible by receiving the backing of major city officials, including the mayor, D.B. McKay. McKay, as fortune would have it, also ran the Tampa Tribune, the largest daily in the city. In the weeks that followed, the Tribune and tobacco trade journals parroted the claims of manufacturers throughout Southern Florida. They also won the support of the CMIU. The CMIU argued that the decision to back the Citizens Committee was in “the best interest of organized labor and would be beneficial to the entire labor situation.” On a broader level, they argued that they “chose Americanism and manhood over class conflict and cross-sex, interracial organizing.”⁵²

The most glaring example of state-sanctioned lawlessness came from the kidnapping and forceful deportation of thirteen men associated with La Resistencia. Luis Barcia Guilabert, an organizer in La Resistencia, was of the thirteen. Already aware that several men had been forced from their homes by the citizens committee, he knew that he was a likely target as one of La Resistencia’s main organizers. Working off the glow of a kerosene lamp in his home, he penned a final manifesto knowing that he was likely to be taken. He awoke his wife, told her of the situation, and asked her to hide the manifesto and release it tomorrow. Sure enough, Barcia soon saw a number of shadows approach his home. With the house pitch black, he hid in a corner and hoped to evade the committee. He was eventually found and thrown into a waiting car. The next day he found himself with a group of fellow workers as they were transported out of Tampa by trolley and eventually driven far from Tampa. When they finally reached Florida’s gulf coast, they were greeted by members of the citizens committee and several prominent Tampa citizens. As Barcia recalled, “What a pity that a photographer did not appear at that moment to take our

⁵² Hewitt, 131.

picture! What an interesting spectacle it would have made: a group of well dressed gentlemen with guns in their hands, threatening six workers, whose only crime was representing their fellow workers who were requesting a small raise in wages.” On the ship, the men found an additional seven workers that had been kidnapped, all with no sense of where they were being taken. Days later they were dumped on a beach in an unfamiliar location. The men were able to track down an indigenous man where they found out they were on Honduran shores.⁵³ They eventually found their way to a small town where they arranged a ship to take them back to the United States. Aboard *Gertrude*, a small fruit schooner, the group made their way to Key West and a crowd of eager Cubans gave them a hero’s welcome.⁵⁴

Back home in Ybor City, confusion and outrage ruled the day with women leading the way. Remaining leaders of La Resistencia demanded to know about their comrades’ whereabouts and assured local officials that the strike would not cease. The wives of many of the manufacturers were among the most vocal of the outraged cigarmakers in the city. A letter penned by the wives of the abducted, which included Carolina Barcia, noted that “Since the 5th our husbands were outrageously kidnapped from our homes, and their whereabouts are not known to us. According to the papers here they have anathematized as anarchists, agitators, etc., and their only guilt is that they’re strikers who have, as all the rest, demanded from the cigar manufacturers what is just and equitable. There were no warrants issued for their arrests...but (they) were ignominiously kidnapped from our homes and on the streets by the police, contrary to the laws of any civilized

⁵³ Jack Fernandez, “An Incident During the Cigar Workers Strike of 1901,” *Cigar City Magazine*, March 4, 2011, <http://www.cigarcitymagazine.com/articles/history/item/cigar-workers-strike-of-1901>.

⁵⁴ *Railroad Telegrapher*, September 1901.

country.”⁵⁵ Altagracia Martinez and Luise Herrera, heads of the stemmers union, were the most vocal cigarworkers during this period. Martinez called for a march down 7th avenue, Ybor City’s major thoroughfare, which raised the ire of the citizens committee. By the time the striking workers reached 17th street, the committee greeted them at gunpoint and ordered them to disperse.⁵⁶ Luise Herrera also made quite an impression on the city officials of Tampa. In a Tampa Morning Tribune article, they noted that Herrera “delivers herself of the most vituperative language against the manufacturers and especially the committee of citizens who rid Tampa of her brother Anarchists. She has even attempted to incite the strikers to arson and making a decided nuisance of herself in general.” The allegation of inciting arson seemed to be a baseless accusation but the Tampa Morning Tribune and the tobacco industry press was largely dedicated to inflaming tensions between citizens and cigarmakers in Tampa at this point. Publications went as far as to threaten both Herrera and Martinez in no uncertain terms. In regards to Herrera, the *United States Tobacco Journal* noted that “It is advisable for her to make herself less prominent, as that deportation committee has not yet been discharged with thanks.”⁵⁷ Martinez was similarly urged “cease making excitable speeches” by the *Tampa Morning Tribune*.⁵⁸ The kidnapping and subsequent acts of vigilantism ushered in an entirely new era of relations between workers and manufacturers. This display of outright vigilantism against local workers, many of whom were American citizens, signaled that city officials and manufacturers were willing to use extralegal means as a way of resolving labor conflicts.

⁵⁵ *Tampa Tribune*, December 11, 1988.

⁵⁶ Emilio del Rio, *Yo Fui Uno de Los Fundadores de Ybor City* (Tampa, 1972), 64.

⁵⁷ *United States Tobacco Journal*, August 24, 1901.

⁵⁸ *Morning Tribune*, August 29, 1901.

No blow was more debilitating for the strikers than the rift that developed with Havana's cigar workers. Beginning in the 1880s, the solidarity expressed by workers in Havana and Southern Florida were central to gains made in the region-wide industry. The post-1898 landscape changed critical aspects of this dynamic. As aforementioned, the fallout following the war left jobs more sparse and Cuban cigar workers more desperate. This came to a head when La Resistencia made overtures for assistance from Havana's *La Liga Cubano*. La Liga Cubano's terse reply noted that they would not be providing institutional assistance to the Ybor City strike and cautioned against sending workers to Havana for short-term employment. Aside from an assertion from La Liga that La Resistencia had not provided adequate help in a recent strike of theirs, the statement also spoke to broader issues between the two groups. La Resistencia had already explored the possibility of extending the organization to Key West and Havana; this strategy would have likely been employed had La Resistencia prevailed in 1901. With the possibility of La Resistencia competing for the same workers, La Liga likely saw this as an opportunity to limit their growth. Indeed, La Liga not only refused to help La Resistencia but actively conspired against the strikers by late August. A report that noted a group of selectors arriving from Havana to work as strikebreakers also asserted that "La Liga Cubano has informed the manufacturers that it can supply all the pickers, packers, and selectors needed."⁵⁹ Key West remained loyal and continued to replenish the union's strike funds.⁶⁰ However, with a key ally now working against them, La Resistencia grew desperate and victory seemed out of reach.

The selective vigilantism of the Citizens Committee and city officials became the outright norm near the end of the strike. One key institution that they disrupted were La Resistencia's

⁵⁹ *Morning Tribune*, August 21, 1901.

⁶⁰ *Morning Tribune*, August 15, 1901.

soup kitchens which were spread out across the Tampa Bay area. A “raiding party” of the Citizens Committee soon destroyed the soup kitchens, placing a great deal of pressure on strike leaders to find ways to feed the thousands of striking workers.⁶¹ Manufacturers also strictly enforced evictions of strikers whose rents were past due.⁶² Hungry and homeless, one of the final blows was the creation a city ordinance known as the Vagrancy Law. The law essentially argued that people capable of being employed who were unemployed were vagrants and were forced to either return to work or be arrested—this became a common tactic to intimidate workers and house many of them in local prisons. A march of wives led by Altagracia Martinez went down to the local jail where they were able to successfully earn the release of many of the men.⁶³ Nevertheless, the vagrancy law continued to serve as a tool for city officials to harass local workers on strike. On the other end, the Citizens Committee continued to threaten and deport members of La Resistencia’s leadership. The citizens committee regularly gave notice to members of the leadership committee that they would be handled with if they did not leave town. Members that refused were sometimes deported in much the same way as the group of 13—Alejandro Rodriguez and Amicito Valdez were two such leaders.⁶⁴

The inevitable end of the strike soon followed. La Resistencia’s strike funds were depleted. They had trouble feeding their workers. In a last ditch effort, they tried to find a compromise with the CMIU, but the AFL-affiliate recognized this as an opportunity to deal a mighty blow to La Resistencia, and they did not pass up on it. With little support forthcoming

⁶¹ *Tampa Tribune*, December 11, 1988; *La Gaceta*, July 23, 1954.

⁶² *Morning Tribune*, August 20, 1901.

⁶³ *La Gaceta*, July 23, 1954; *Tampa Tribune*, February 18, 1987.

⁶⁴ *Morning Tribune*, August 27, 1901.

and workers anxious to make money, the strike was called over on November 24, nearly four months after the strike commenced. The union attempted to regroup but by 1902, La Resistencia dissolved. The manufacturers and city officials of Tampa were the big winner in the aftermath. Manufacturers now possessed a network with each other that allowed for coordinated action and also had key support among Tampa's city officials for future strikes. The other obvious winner was the CMIU which became the default labor organization in Ybor City and Key West. Following the strike, CMIU leaders believed they would introduce a new era of relations between workers and manufacturers, free of the opprobrium that plagued the Cuban-led unions in Southern Florida. The manufacturers proved to be intractable as ever in the years that followed.

The Failure of Bread and Butter Unionism and a Lynching

Manufacturers in Key West and Tampa redoubled their efforts to exert total control over the Clear Havana industry in the failure of La Resistencia's strike. Key West manufacturers adopted Tampa's strategies soon after the Strike of 1901. Mere months removed from the strike, an industry-wide strike was threatened in Key West. The newly formed Key West Manufacturers Association banded together and was able to outlast the cigarmakers. Following the strike, industry insiders made particular note about how cooperation with Tampa manufacturers helped maintain power on the side of the manufacturers. When faced with the opportunity to take orders off the hands of Key West manufacturers, "Tampa manufacturers refused business, because, as they stated, they would not take advantage of another manufacturer while he was in trouble."⁶⁵

⁶⁵ *Tobacco Leaf*, January 1902. Special Collections, University of South Florida. Arsenio Sanchez Collection, Box 3, Folder 1902.

Soon after, Key West manufacturers rekindled talks with their Tampa counterparts to formalize relations between the two sides in an effort to make “themselves invulnerable against the attacks to which they have been subjected in the past.”⁶⁶

The CMIU became the dominant organizing power in Key West and Ybor City, but local cigarmakers were perpetually skeptical of them. Plans to replace the CMIU with another organizations were many. As early as 1902, a plan was underway in Ybor City to create a more radical organization “that would mean the resurrection of La Resistencia, whether under that name or another.”⁶⁷ These attempts were tenuous as cigarmakers were careful to organize a union that would be subject to the same types of harassment and violence as La Resistencia. In the meantime, the CMIU also struggled to get certain *gremios* to join the CMIU—the wrappers selectors of Ybor City were especially adamant about not joining the International.⁶⁸ The cigarmakers of Southern Florida continued to be wary of the CMIU and had a long memory in regards to their treatment of La Resistencia.

The best alternative to the CMIU came from Key West in 1905 and 1906. In November of 1905, an unidentified Tampa organizer traveled to Key West and began organizing at the Ruy Lopez Ca. factory, walking around the factory and telling workers what they should be paid for the cigars they were producing. A commotion began in the factory with the majority of the

⁶⁶ “To Work Together Tampa and Key West Manufacturers Will Affiliate,” 1902. Special Collections, University of South Florida. Arsenio Sanchez Collection, Box 3, Folder 1902.

⁶⁷ *Tobacco Leaf*, October 1902. Special Collections, University of South Florida. Arsenio Sanchez Collection, Box 5, Folder Labor.

⁶⁸ *Tobacco Leaf*, August 31, 1904.

Cuban workers arguing that they needed their own union again and walked out of the factory.⁶⁹ Soon after, the Cuban cigarmakers of Key West denounced the CMIU and formed the Torcedores Cuban Cigarmakers Union, demanding a new set of price listings and classifications for their cigars.⁷⁰ Both sides became entrenched as Key West's manufacturers demanded to keep price listings in line with those outlined in Tampa. The workers stayed organized and militant about their position but they soon fell victim to vigilante tactics. Just as in Ybor City, Key West manufacturers realized the power of using vigilantism as a way of rupturing the leadership of the union and breaking morale. By January, eight members of the leadership committee were "invited" to leave for Cuba.⁷¹ Soon after, an additional seventeen workers were forced out of Key West in a more brazen effort. The workers in this case were surrounded by a hundred armed vigilantes outside their meeting house, where the vigilantes "compelled them to sign a statement that the strike of cigarmakers was ended. They were told that if they did not appeal to the press, their families would be cared for and that they would be permitted to return, but otherwise their families would be abandoned."⁷² This offense managed to rankle even Cuban authorities with officials claiming that the rights of Cuban citizens had been violated along with international treaty—these complaints did not yield any legal action against the perpetrators.⁷³ Sure enough, a mass meeting was soon held at the *Instituto San Carlos* where the strike was called off.

⁶⁹ *United States Tobacco Journal*, November 18, 1905.

⁷⁰ *United States Tobacco Journal*, November 11, 1905.

⁷¹ *Florida Times Union*, January 18, 1906.

⁷² *Florida Times Union*, January 19, 1906.

⁷³ *Ibid*

In the wake of Key West's strike, the CMIU continued to be the only viable option for workers looking to act collectively and not meet violent reprisal as a result. The largest collective action the union and its workers took was in 1910 in Ybor City. The commotion began with the selectors union demanding to be recognized in Tampa's cigar factories. Soon, the CMIU capitalized on this rhetoric and argued that every group of cigarworkers in the CMIU should be recognized and work in a closed shop system. Ironically, this was the same battle that La Resistencia had waged nearly a decade earlier. This strike proved to be ever larger with an estimated 8,000-10,000 workers on strike in the city. Rallying together broad constituencies of ethnic Tampa became a priority and establishing an aid committee with Key West was also established.⁷⁴

Similarly, the manufacturers fell back on their collective power to draw divisions between the cigar workers. In particular, the threat of violence came early and often. One manufacturer was particularly clear early on in noting that "the officials of the International are out for blood. We must have their blood or they will have ours."⁷⁵ Strikebreakers were also critical; this was especially true for selectors who were among the most valuable workers in the factory. Knowing this, manufacturers were in touch with workers in Havana in the lead-up to the strike. As early as late July, the selectors union in Havana had already announced that "all members that want to go Tampa to work are free to do so..."⁷⁶ By the next day, there were already reports of selectors waiting in Key West to be transported north.⁷⁷ By August, a new

⁷⁴ *El Diario de Tampa*, July 30, 1910.

⁷⁵ *United States Tobacco Journal*, August 6, 1910.

⁷⁶ *El Diario de Tampa*, July 26, 1910.

⁷⁷ *El Diario de Tampa*, July 27, 1910

citizens committee had been created to “try and arbitrate between employers and employees.”⁷⁸ Given the overlap between the citizens committee and the local business community, they were open to some changes in the factory but stood firm against union recognition and a closed shop. At various moments during the strike, manufacturers opened up their doors and declared an open shop—workers were sometimes able to protest their closure but manufacturers were usually able to keep their factories running. By October, one factory reported “100 men were at work, the Citizen’s Committee effectively patrolling the streets on foot and in automobiles.”⁷⁹

The workers, conversely, were divided at every turn. The rivalry with Havana continued unimpeded. The selectors union of each city began a very public feud played out in the labor press of their respective cities. Ybor City’s union called Havana’s strikebreaking “unjustifiable” and debated previous entanglements between the two unions.⁸⁰ Similar bickering occurred with workers in Key West. While Key West workers supported the strike with financial donation, many in Ybor City wondered aloud whether they were doing enough and questioned their devotion to worker unity. An entire series devoted to this topic was published in *El Diario de Tampa*. The writer noted that “There is no solidarity” among workers and asked the cigarmakers of Key West “What did you do with the generosity of the past? Where are your altruistic sentiments? Perhaps you have exhausted the instinct of charity?”⁸¹ The fighting also occurred among workers in Ybor City with tensions flying high among strikers and strikebreakers. Antonio Albedo was one such strikebreaker. Tired of the strike, he decided to openly recruit

⁷⁸ *United States Tobacco Journal*, August 27, 1910.

⁷⁹ *United States Tobacco Journal*, October 22, 1910.

⁸⁰ *El Diario de Tampa*, August 23, 1910.

⁸¹ *El Diario de Tampa*, September 1, 1910; September 12, 1910.

union cigarmakers and convince them to return to work. A crowd of union strikers soon surrounded him when Albedo bolted and ran into a saloon. He was cornered there too and eventually forced to the union hall where workers berated him for serving as a strikebreaker. Soon after, he was driven out to nearby Palmetto Beach and told not to return.⁸² These types of confrontations continued throughout the strike. In November, two strikebreakers were surrounded by CMIU workers with one of the strikebreakers eventually pulling out his revolver and firing to disperse the crowd—the stray bullet wound up in the knee of a local resident.⁸³

The violence reached its apex over the shooting of J.E. Easterling. Easterling, a bookkeeper at the Bustillo Brothers factory, had already clashed with the striking workers. Early on in the strike, a group of CMIU members attempted to barge their way into the Bustillo factory when Easterling fired his revolver in the air to force the group away. As a factory that remained in operation during the strike, it was frequently the target of protests among workers. On September 14, another crowd formed outside the Bustillo factory with the CMIU workers shouting at the scabs that labored inside. Easterling stepped outside to address the workers when two shots rang out, striking Easterling.⁸⁴ Outrage was immediate. Manufacturers and the Citizens Committee attributed the shooting to strikers run amok. The CMIU denounced the shooting and insisted their workers played no role in it. Two men at the nearby Y. Pendas & Alvarez, situated on the factory's roof at the time, were the only witnesses who claimed to have gotten a good look at the shooters.⁸⁵ Days later, Castenge Ficcarotta and Angelo Albano were arrested for the

⁸² *United States Tobacco Journal*, September 3, 1910.

⁸³ *United States Tobacco Journal*, November 5, 1910.

⁸⁴ *United States Tobacco Journal*, September 24, 1910.

⁸⁵ *United States Tobacco Journal*, October 10, 1910.

shooting. The suspects were a puzzling pair. Both men were Italians who were not affiliated with the cigar industry. Ficcarotta was the older and seedier of the two. Listed only as a “laborer” in county roles, he had a violent reputation in Tampa and was once tried and acquitted of murder in an unrelated case.⁸⁶ Albano was 25, and described as both an “idler” and someone that occasionally worked in insurance.⁸⁷

Both Italians were killed in brutal fashion on the same night they were arrested. Ficcarotta and Albano were first taken to the local West Tampa jail. Fearing that the location was unsafe, Tampa police asked that they be transferred to Tampa’s county jail. Two sheriffs and a hack driver were tasked with transporting the prisoners on the night of September 20th. For reasons that are unclear, the officers directed the driver to take Grand Central Avenue instead of the more direct route through Fortune Street Bridge.⁸⁸ Once the group approached Grand Central Avenue, they were greeted by an armed mob. One of the officers, Deputy Sheriff T.H. Bryant, recalled that the mob was composed of Americans given that he “did not hear anyone speaking Spanish or Latin.”⁸⁹ The armed gunmen forced the prisoners out of the carriage and the officers were left waiting until the mob’s vehicles sped away. The driver of the hack, William Lowe, commented to the officers to “make peace with Jesus as we would all be in Hell in the

⁸⁶ *Tobacco World*, October 1, 1910.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*; Gene Burnett, "Death and Terror Scar Tampa's Past," *Florida Trend*, December 1975, 78.

⁸⁸ “The Last Lynching in Tampa,” 1959. Special Collections, University of South Florida. Tony Pizzo Collection, Box 73, Folder Resistencia.

⁸⁹ “Confidential Informations Obtained from Mr. T.H. Bryant, Deputy Sheriff of Tampa.” Special Collections, University of South Florida. Tony Pizzo Collection, Box 54, Folder Lynchings Ficcarota and Albano

morning.”⁹⁰ The officers returned to the West Tampa station and called for an immediate search to find the prisoners and the mob. Members of the vigilante group were never identified but local police soon found the two Italians. In a wooded area of Tampa, police found the straw hat of Angelo Albano. Above the hat, hanging off the limb of a large oak tree, were the lynched bodies of Albano and Ficcarotta. Both men were still tied together and displayed in a very deliberate manner. Ficcarotta was displayed with his pipe in his mouth, his mustache draping over part of it. A note was also pinned to one of the men with a message signed by “Justice”: “Beware! Others take notice or go the same way. We know seven more. We are watching you. If any more citizens are molested, look out.”⁹¹

For Tampa’s Italians, the lynching bore tragic symbolism. The largest mass lynching in United States history is what brought them to Ybor City in the first place. Sicilians had previously formed a vibrant community in nineteenth-century New Orleans. Following the murder of the city’s police chief, David Hennessy, nine Italians were tried and ultimately acquitted in 1891. A mob soon dragged out the nine accused and an additional two Italians being held on unrelated charges and lynched them all. The event was celebrated as righteous and necessary. The *New York Times* lamented the gruesome nature of the murders but acknowledged that “Lynch law was the only course open to the people of New Orleans to stay the issue of a new license to the Mafia to continue its bloody practices.”⁹² In the case of Ficcarotta and Albano, the American press once again expressed the necessity of lynch law. The

⁹⁰ “Confidential Informations Obtained from Mr. William Lowe.” Special Collections, University of South Florida.

Tony Pizzo Collection, Box 54, Folder Lynchings Ficcarota and Albano.

⁹¹ *United States Tobacco Journal*, September 24, 1910.

⁹² *New York Times*, March 16, 1891.

Tampa Morning Tribune boasted that “Two corpses swinging in the moonlight from a giant oak on Tuesday night gave Tampa’s rebuke to lawlessness and spoke with the eloquence of tragedy the verdict that the people of this city will not tolerate the ‘business’ of assassination for hire.”⁹³ Just as in the New Orleans case, Italian officials expressed outrage over the United States’ handling of the lynching. One Italian representative submitting a formal complaint asserted that “I have reason to believe that the lynching itself was not an instance of a temporary outburst of popular anger, but was rather planned, in cold blood; to the most trifling detail...”⁹⁴

The lynching set the tone for the rest of the strike. Similar to the 1901 strike, the manufacturers had city officials and the local press on their side—even the lynching was blamed on the cigarworkers. The Tampa Morning Tribune admitted that Ficcarotta and Albano had no formal association with the cigarmakers on strike but insisted that “the conclusion is irresistible that they were acting as the agents of a certain element of the strikers in their attempt to end the life of Mr. Easterling.”⁹⁵ From this point on, nearly all major labor actions were immediately met by armed resistance. In a typical example, when workers protested open factories, they were immediately dispersed and assured that “Citizens are now patrolling our city armed with Winchesters day and night, and the effect is good.”⁹⁶ Strikebreakers continued to come in and not only from Havana. Manufacturers recruited from the northeast factories and the Sanchez &

⁹³ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 1910. Special Collections, University of South Florida. Tony Pizzo Collection, Box 54, Folder Lynching Ficcarota and Albano.

⁹⁴ Gaetano Moroni to Ambassador, October 11, 1910. Special Collections, University of South Florida. Tony Pizzo Collection, Box 54, Folder Lynching Ficcarota and Albano.

⁹⁵ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 1910. Special Collections, University of South Florida. Tony Pizzo Collection, Box 54, Folder Lynching Ficcarota and Albano.

⁹⁶ *Tobacco Leaf*, November 3, 1910.

Haya factory began funneling workers in from a little-known town named Miami.⁹⁷ The Citizens Committee was again deployed to disrupt essential institutions for the strikers—they at one point raided and destroyed the local union hall over an alleged attempt to find information linking the deceased Italians to the strike. Manufacturers also continued to rely on the tactic of evicting workers who could not pay their rent. With the inevitable awaiting, workers returned to their tables on January 26.⁹⁸

Conclusion

The period from 1898 to 1910 in many ways represented the most hopeful aspirations of cigarmakers in Key West and Ybor City. Following the Spanish-American War, the disparate elements of Ybor's Latin community united to form *La Resistencia*. The union's insistence on a broad coalition of workers that included women, black Cubans, and workers from other industries symbolized the realization of the radical aspirations of Florida's cigarmakers. Ybor City's growing influence as an organizing force made a clash with American labor increasingly likely. As the CMIU sought to increase its influence in Florida, American labor and *La Resistencia* battled over members and factory recognition. The American labor movement sought to demonstrate the inability of Latin workers to organize on their own. The CMIU in concert with tobacco journals leveled a critique that characterized Latin workers as indolent and possessed by foreign ideology. An increasingly anti-radical climate in Tampa allowed for the CMIU to make organizing gains throughout Tampa. By 1901, CMIU strike-breakers working alongside the Tampa Citizens Committee were able to ensure *La Resistencia's* defeat and

⁹⁷ *United States Tobacco Journal*, November 5, 1910.

⁹⁸ Burnett, 80.

fracture Latin organizing. The CMIU did not fare any better. They were able to organize the Cuban, Spanish, and Italian workers of Southern Florida but their top-down approach to organizing was less agile than the radical unions they replaced. This lessened the importance of individual members and dissuaded the use of the wildcat strike. As one worker argued about this period: “In the days when we made fifty-five dollars a week we didn’t have no unions. Maybe that’s why we got so much pay. When we use to strike we always won, but since the unions we ain’t won a strike...This AF of L union is no benefit to us. Before we can strike now we have to get permission from the Florida union officers, and they have to get permission from the national union officers, and they won’t let us strike”⁹⁹

The failure of the 1910 strike was the beginning of a broader declension in the Clear Havana factories of Southern Florida. Part of this was related to the dynamic between workers and factory owners and part of this was due to broader changes in the United States’ tobacco industry. The CMIU continued to be the dominant organizing union in both Key West and Ybor City but they could never mount a major victory. The use of strikebreaking and vigilantism ensured that manufacturers would continue to win battles against organized labor. In 1920, the CMIU launched another major campaign in Ybor City that resulted in a general strike which lasted ten months. The results were the same. Cooperation between manufacturers, city officials, and the police persisted. The cigarmakers put up a strong fight but the manufacturers had all the advantages and used their power to intimidate workers and impede organizing. Recalling the communal soup house that the workers constructed, Domino Ginesta recalled that “the

⁹⁹ Enrique and Amanda, interview by Stetson Kennedy and Adolpha Pellate, Folklore Project, Life Histories, Works Progress Administration, January 3, 1939, 11.

manufacturers made some combination with the authorities with the result that one day a few policemen came to this place, destroying everything they could lay their hands on. The food already cooked, and all the groceries were thrown out on the street.”¹⁰⁰ Resigned to the declining conditions in factories, some workers simply moved. Fernando Lemos remembered that when the strike was declared “I purchased a Ford truck and engaged in moving furniture. I remained in this transfer business for some ten years.”¹⁰¹ By the time the strike ended, the workers that remained were largely deflated and the result “completely destroyed the International for all times.”¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Domingo Ginesta, 2.

¹⁰¹ Fernando Lemos, Folklore Project, Life Histories, Works Progress Administration, 1935, 2.

¹⁰² Enrique Pendas, interview by F. Valdes, Folklore Project, Life Histories, Works Progress Administration, 1935, 8.

Chapter 4 - Jim Crow Florida and Becoming Cuban American, 1880s-1920s

Introduction

Manuel Cabeza's back looked like “one of those red cube steaks that has been all diced up to make it tender.” A Canary Islander known to friends as *Isleño*, Cabeza was forcefully abducted from his Key West home on December 22nd, 1921 by a mob of Ku Klux Klan members. He was driven to a remote area of the island, horsewhipped, tarred, feathered, and left for dead. Cabeza's offense was living with a woman of color. His relationship with a half African American, half Cuban woman known as *Rosita Negra* was a serious crime in 1920's Florida. Norberto Diaz, Cabeza's friend and one of thousands of Cuban cigar makers on the island, recalled the notoriously abrasive *Isleño* and his attempt to fight the KKK members. Before he was beaten unconscious, Diaz noted that Cabeza was able to tear the hoods off several members of the masked mob. He vowed in repeated screams that he would repay them all.¹

Cabeza exacted his revenge two days later on Christmas Eve. While driving in a taxi, he spotted one of his attackers. William Decker, manager of the Samuel Davis cigar factory, was driving home with his family's Christmas dinner in his trunk. Cabeza's taxi followed Decker and pulled alongside his Ford just as it passed the Cuban Club on Duval Street. Cabeza leaned over, pulled out his revolver, and fired several shots into Decker's car with the fatal shot piercing Decker's jaw just as he stumbled out of his vehicle. Cabeza ran four blocks and took refuge in the home of Rafael Solano. A crowd composed of on-lookers, KKK members, and local police soon

¹ Ann Banks, *First Person America* (New York: Knopf, 1980), 245-247.

gathered around the residence. Cabeza situated himself in the cupola of Solano's home and engaged in a shootout with the police and deputized citizens. After an hours-long standoff, Cabeza surrendered himself to local police.

Cabeza's final hours were a grim reminder of Florida justice in the early twentieth century. He was placed in county jail and protected by armed Marines for several hours. The Marines withdrew by midnight and shortly after, several cars full of armed Klan members raided the jail. Cabeza was beaten relentlessly in his jail cell. Some say he may have died there. He was then tied to the back of a car and dragged down Flagler Street. Cabeza's body was later found, lynched and swinging from one of the thousands of coconut palms that dot Key West; his body riddled with bullets. No arrests were made.²

Cabeza's story was decades in the making. Southern Florida was once a haven for immigrants of various ethnic and racial backgrounds, but by the 1920's all of Florida resembled the rest of the Deep South. Concentrated mainly in Key West and Ybor City, thousands of Cubans and a smattering of Spaniards, Italians, and Bahamians called Florida home in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. These immigrants were drawn to the United States by work, particularly the multimillion dollar Clear Havana cigar industry. For much of their early history, Key West and Ybor City were on the fringes of the United States and bore little resemblance to an American community. One observer noted about Ybor City that “although you may live in this part of Tampa for months, you will hear nothing but Spanish. There are Spanish theatres, clubs and restaurants; the cooking is Spanish-Cuban, and on a sunny day this odd-

² *Tampa Morning Tribune*, December 26, 1921; *Miami Herald*, December 26, 1921; *Key West Citizen*, December 23, 1977.

looking foreign district might easily be taken for a portion of Havana or a suburb of Madrid.”³ Beginning in the 1890's, a sharp increase in the American population coupled with increasing state power changed the landscape of the Caribbean South. Cubans in Southern Florida soon dealt with the everyday realities of Jim Crow laws, nativism, and residential segregation.

The purpose of this chapter is to track the marked shift in Key West and Ybor City from Caribbean colonies to Deep South towns. In particular, the chapter follows the divergent paths of Cubans by looking at race. Previously a minor issue, race became an essential marker in determining status and rights in twentieth century Florida. White Cubans, while still ostracized in some instances, were allowed the possibility of becoming Cuban Americans treated as full citizens. Conversely, Cubans of color were lumped into second class citizenship among Florida's African-American population. This shift reflected trends in both Cuba and the United States. Southern Florida's Cuban communities were a direct product of the Cuban independence movement and its many émigré communities. As a result, the communities of Key West and Ybor City echoed some of the broader trends in the Cuban independence movement and the early Cuban republic. Ada Ferrer and Alejandro de la Fuente have written about the racial egalitarianism of the Cuban independence movement and the various successes and limitations presented by this outlook.⁴ As Ferrer has shown, the “raceless” vision that Cuban revolutionaries embraced was at times corrupted by old prejudices and stereotypes of black Cubans. This chapter considers how many of those same developments took place in the diasporic

³ *Tobacco Leaf*, January 7, 1902.

⁴ Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Alejandro de la Fuente, “Myths of Racial Democracy: Cuba, 1900-1912,” *Latin American Research Review* 34, no. 3 (1999): 39-73.

communities of Florida. Cubans of color played prominent roles in Key West and Ybor City but their relative importance waned by the end of the independence movement.

The chapter also considers the role of Jim Crow and the racial categories assigned to “inbetween people.” David Roediger, Virginia Dominguez, and James Barrett have all written about racially ambiguous groups and their integration into the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.⁵ For Eastern and Southern European immigrants, Creoles, and Mexicans, Jim Crow was an ideology and legal system that re-oriented status and privilege. In the context of the United States’ racial binary, these groups were seen as somewhere between black and white; the same was true for Cubans. Like creoles in Louisiana, Cubans were split on the basis of skin color with white Cubans benefitting from an in-between status while Cubans of color were viewed, legally and socially, as black. Winston James and Susan Greenbaum have written important works on black Cubans in Ybor City that chart their journey from compatriots to victims of racism and urban renewal.⁶ This chapter looks to build upon their work by telling a more comprehensive narrative that incorporates racial politics in Cuba, the largely untold history of Jim Crow in Key West, and the active role of white Cubans in the splintering of Southern Florida’s Cuban communities.

⁵ Virginia Dominguez, *White by Definition: Social Classification in Creole Louisiana* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991); James R. Barrett and David Roediger, “In-Between Peoples: Race, Nationality and the ‘New Immigrant’ Working Class,” *American Ethnic History* 16, no. 3 (Spring 1997): 3-44.

⁶ Susan D. Greenbaum, *More than Black: Afro-Cubans in Tampa*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2002); Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (London: Verso, 1999).

A Cuban Dream and an African American Reality

For much of the late nineteenth century, the experience of black Cubans in the United States was particularly unique. Part of this is explained by the anonymity offered by Southern Florida. Key West and Ybor City were sparsely populated areas when Cubans first arrived. Away from the major city centers of the country, they developed unique communities that were not subject to the same type of discrimination that occurred in much of the Deep South. This type of community thrived in other fringes of the country where working-class communities largely composed of non-white residents created their own set of values and racial conceptions.⁷ The Cuban independence movement was also crucial for the attempts at racial egalitarianism in Southern Florida's Cuban communities. Cubans of color played critical roles in the intellectual, military, and political sects of the independence movement. Moreover, prominent Cubans of color frequently visited and often lived in Key West and Ybor City. The presence of Paulina Pedroso, Antonio Maceo, Martin Morua Delgado, and many other Cuban luminaries led to ongoing discussions over race while also demonstrating how Cubans of color could play active roles in a future Cuban republic. Racial inequality was still a persistent issue in Southern Florida but it was treated as an issue that was being actively addressed by Cubans. Cuban labor unions were also essential to the egalitarian mission of Southern Florida. As evidenced in Chapter 2 and 3, from the 1880s to the early twentieth century, Southern Florida's labor unions were deeply influenced by Spanish anarchism. This approach which involved the recruitment of all workers regardless of race or gender continued to offer opportunities to Cubans of color. This changed

⁷ See Allison Varzally, *Making a Non-White America: Californians Coloring Outside Ethnic Lines, 1925-1955* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

dramatically with the rise of Cigarmakers International Union in South Florida but until 1901, labor unions in Key West and Ybor City actively encouraged and supported black voices.

The racial egalitarianism of Southern Florida did not go unnoticed by African Americans. James Weldon Johnson, a writer, diplomat, and Civil Rights leader, chronicled a Clear Havana factory in his mostly fictional *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. The protagonist is multiracial and moves throughout the South in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century navigating his own racial identity. The character at one point moves to Jacksonville where he labors in a *Clear Havana* factory—he moves swiftly starting as a stemmer and eventually becoming a *lector*. Johnson, who was raised in Jacksonville, was likely drawing from his own experience and fascination with Cuban culture and its very different views on race. The nameless protagonist befriends several Cubans and is in awe of the integrated Cuban community, their cosmopolitan attitude, and overall intelligence. The Ex-Colored Man especially remembered one black Cuban friend “telling me of the Gomezes, both the white one and the black one, of Maceo and Bandera, he grew positively eloquent. He also showed that he was a man of considerable education and reading. He spoke English excellently, and frequently surprised me by using words one would hardly expect from a foreigner.”⁸ The Cubans that the ex-colored man interacted with were in many ways his opposite. The protagonist is in a constant state of uncertainty over his own racial identity; he passes as white or black depending on context and struggles over determining his racial identity. Conversely, the Cubans of Florida were confident, were dealt with as equal partners by white Cubans, and were proud of their racial heritage.

⁸ James Weldon Johnson, *Three Negro Classics* (New York City: Avon Books, 1965), 431-432.

These types of observations were also made by the African-American press. In 1888, the *New York Age* sent a correspondent to Key West to document the “peculiarities” of the city. The correspondent was almost immediately taken aback by the Cuban dominance on the island. When the correspondent walked into a Cuban drug store asking for quinine capsules, the clerk answered “Me no *sabe* English,” to which the correspondent replied “Well, me no *sabe* Spanish—what are we going to do about it?”⁹ Aside from the language barrier, the writer was impressed by the integrated Cuban community and its contrast to the rest of the American South. Later that year, when the citizens of Key West elected two African Americans, one as county judge and another as county sheriff, the paper declared that “Key West is the freest town in the South.” The writer added that “There are no attempts at bulldozing and intimidation during campaigns and at elections here. No Negroes are murdered here in cold blood, and there are no gross miscarriages of justice.”¹⁰

However, by the 1890s, Southern Florida was becoming much less amenable to African Americans. In both Key West and Ybor City, the use of intimidation and violence were increasingly used to halt African-American progress in Florida. In 1894, a Catholic church patronized by Tampa’s African-American community was burned down. Days later, when members of the community went back to the church to rebuild it, they found a note on a nearby tree asserting that the church was burned down because it was too close to white residents. The anonymous letter writer cautioned that any further attempts to move black institutions closer to white residents would be met with similar results.¹¹ African Americans were also under the

⁹ *New York Age*, November 3, 1888.

¹⁰ *New York Age*, December 1, 1888.

¹¹ *Florida Times Union*, February 21, 1894.

threat of lynch law in Southern Florida. In Key West, a race war nearly erupted over the case of Sylvanus Johnson in 1897. Johnson, an African American, was accused of raping Maggie Atwell, a white woman. While on trial, Johnson was almost lynched. An angry mob attempted to take justice into their own hands but local African American intervened and patrolled the prison. Soon after, a melee between white and black residents led to the killing of William Gardner, a white man.¹² The story became a national scandal and culminated with Johnson's guilty verdict and subsequent hanging. In looking through local and national reports, Cubans are notably absent in this affair. Nevertheless, stories like these underscored that while Cuban communities enjoyed relative independence and freedom in Southern Florida, there were still real consequences to being African American in Florida. This was part of a broader application of Jim Crow segregation that would eventually affect all communities of color in Florida.

The Specter of Jim Crow

Florida did not have the same historical legacy of racism and inequality that much of the Deep South had but during the Jim Crow era, Florida mimicked many of the South's broader trends. Over a decade before *Plessy v. Ferguson*, Jim Crow was alive and well in Florida. In 1885, Floridians elected Edward Aynsworth Perry as governor. A New Englander by birth, he served in the Confederate Army as colonel of Florida's 2nd infantry regiment. Perry campaigned on his hatred of carpetbaggers and the belief that "the alternative to a Democratic victory was 'negro supremacy.'"¹³ Perry's administration systematically removed elected black officials and imposed a series of reforms that introduced a new era of race relations. Like the rest of the

¹² *Florida Times Union*, June 26, 1897; *New York Times*, June 26, 1897.

¹³ Canter Brown Jr. and Larry Eugene Rivers, *Laborers in the Vineyard of the Lord: The Beginnings of the AME Church in Florida, 1865-1895* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 144.

American South, racism was built into the legal code of Florida but the use of extralegal violence was particularly common. A study of lynching during the Jim Crow era revealed that Florida had more lynchings per capita than any other state. Mississippi placed a distant second.¹⁴ Jim Crow laws were created to deal with the African American population and so it was unclear how legal changes would affect the immigrant communities of Southern Florida.

Perry initiated a new state constitution in 1885 that underscored the difficulties of classifying Cubans. One particular provision forbid marriage between “a white person and a negro, or between a white person and a person of negro descent to the fourth generation....”¹⁵ The miscegenation law pointed to the earliest signs of Jim Crow in Southern Florida. The clause was rarely invoked but it did show the natural consequences of the broad language used in Florida's constitution. In a series of court cases in the 1880s and 1890s, lawmakers and judges attempted to clarify the link between Cubans and the concept of “negro.”

The career of Monroe County Judge James Dean pointed to the many variables involved in prosecuting race. Dean was one of the first African-American men to practice law in Florida; he was the county judge that the *New York Age* heralded as proof of Key West's forward-thinking populace. In 1888, Dean granted a marriage license to Antonio Gonzalez and Annie Maloney. Soon after, a complaint was filed by a Key West resident claiming that Dean had “performed the marriage between one Manuel Gonzalez, a white man, and a colored

¹⁴ Margaret Vandiver, *Lethal Punishment: Lynchings and Legal Executions in the South* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 25.

¹⁵ Pauli Murray, *States' Laws on Race and Color* (Cincinnati: Woman's Division of Christian Service, Board of Missions of the Methodist Church, 1950), 77.

woman....”¹⁶ The marriage was more complex. Gonzalez passed as a white Cuban but by his own admission had African heritage. Similarly, Maloney was said to have been of mixed descent with some Cuban heritage but she was viewed as physically black.¹⁷ Dean argued that Gonzalez's mixed heritage absolved him of any wrongdoing. While the state investigated Dean, another case was brought before the judge in May of 1889. Jose de Jesus Valdes was arrested by a constable and accused of taking residence with Rosa Fletcher, a black woman—an offense that violated cohabitation laws in Florida. When the case was brought before Dean, he informed Valdes that he would need to be married to Fletcher or face a prison sentence. Valdes, aware of the state's marriage laws, informed Dean that he was white and therefore could not be married to Fletcher. According to a letter from Valdes' mother in Havana, Dean said that Valdes would have to list himself as “colored” to avoid prosecution. Valdes then fled to Cuba.¹⁸ Shortly after this case, Dean was removed from his position for malfeasance.

The cases of Judge James Dean point to the discord in racial conceptions between the United States and Latin America. As in other Latin American countries, race for Cubans was a flexible, permeable concept that was a matter of gradation. Florida's legislation dealt in absolutes in a way that led to miscalculation. These cases were very rare in Southern Florida in the nineteenth century but they certainly forebode the type of control that the state would later impose on immigrant communities. Similarly, the cases underscored the frequency of interracial relationships in Southern Florida. In other Florida communities, interracial relationships were

¹⁶ Lafayette Lowe to Governor Edward Perry, Florida History Department at the Monroe County Public Library.

¹⁷ *Arizona Republic*, February 24, 2002.

¹⁸ Michaela Valdes to Manuel Delgado, May 18, 1889, Florida History Department at the Monroe County Public Library.

stark occurrences that deviated from the norm. In cities like Key West and Ybor City, they were increasingly commonplace. This was a natural outgrowth of Cuban demographics. Conservative estimates noted that by 1899, 1/3 of Cubans contained some sort of mixed racial heritage in Cuba.¹⁹ With that level of intermixing, levying legal policy on race was bound to be imperfect. Dean's suggestion that Valdes should declare another race was indicative of the arbitrary nature of Florida's racial policies. As Robert Ingalls has argued, the type of mob violence perpetrated against African Americans in Florida was the outgrowth of "the struggle for power among well-defined groups."²⁰ Cubans during this period were yet to be neatly categorized and that benefited them for a time.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, additional Jim Crow legislation was passed and local governments became more adamant about enforcing segregation laws. Some of the first major changes brought on by Jim Crow in Southern Florida involved the reorientation of Cuban institutions. Mutual aid societies were the backbone of immigrant groups in the United States. On the most basic level, they provided members with health insurance and assistance with burials and other essential services. Mutual aid societies also typically hosted concerts, speakers, union meetings, and educated young immigrants. The two most prominent mutual aid societies for Cubans were the *Instituto San Carlos* in Key West and the *Circulo Cubano* in Tampa. In the early twentieth century, both adopted regulations that excluded Cubans of color from their institutions.

¹⁹ De la Fuente, "Myths of Racial Democracy," 48.

²⁰ Robert P. Ingalls, "Lynching and Establishment Violence in Tampa, 1858-1935," *The Journal of Southern History* 53, no. 4 (November 1987): 614.

In Tampa, Cubans of color formed their own organization. The Circulo Cubano had previously served as the major mutual aid society but they had begun to exclude Cubans of color by 1900. In 1904, *La Union Martí-Maceo* was founded. Uniting the ideals and symbolism of José Martí and the mixed-race Antonio Maceo, La Union hoped to represent black Cubans as equal partners in their communities. The name also spoke to the distance between the ideals of the independence movement and the reality that followed. Francisco Rodriguez Sr. was a black Cuban that recalled the difference of race before and after Cuban independence in Ybor City. He noted that “Prior to the end of the war, the black and white Cubans would fraternize and meet together to discuss common problems...But after the war there was a fragmentation between the two races and each started going his way...it became necessary for each group, the white and the black, to form its own organizations since after the war the white Cubans began adhering to the local custom of separating from blacks.”²¹

Similarly, Key West's mutual-aid societies and schools also ran as whites-only institutions. In 1900, *Sociedad Cuba* was founded in Key West and was intended to serve as a mutual-aid society and social club for Cubans. The club's state charter noted that “All males of the Caucasian race of whatever nationality, within the ages of 16 and 50 years of age were eligible for membership.”²² Similar changes were made to Cuban schools. In the 1880s, Florida banned integrated schools. A few Cuban schools, such as the one in Cespedes Hall, defied this order for a few years but by the twentieth century, Cuban schools were whites only. As one of

²¹ Francisco Rodriguez Sr., interview by Fred Beaton and Otis Anthony, African Americans in Florida Project, Special Collections, University of South Florida, August 11, 1978, 6-7.

²² Key West Writers Program, *Sociedad Cuba Inc.* University of Florida, PK Yonge Library Special Collections, 227.

the first interracial schools in the country, Jim Crow's reach was most visible in Key West's Instituto San Carlos. A 1920 report about the institute notes that “classes are conducted from the primary through the seventh grade” and that “the school is open to children of the white race, without tuition charge.”²³ This is a marked shift considering the San Carlos was the institution that once proclaimed racial equality and invited the likes of Antonio Maceo and Martín Morua Delgado to lecture in its halls.

Segregation became the norm in a host of other social spaces. Beginning in 1903, Tampa moved to have segregated rail cars for the electric railway system. Fierce opposition was raised by local black residents but the regulations were official by 1905. Lydia Lopez, remembering her white, Asturian grandfather and her black, Cuban grandmother, recalled their first experience with Jim Crow in Tampa:

“...So there was a lady in the trolley that knew how to speak English and Spanish, and she said what the trolley conductor was saying, that he couldn't sit back there. He says... 'What is wrong with me sitting back here? I like to sit in the back, and this is my wife sitting next to me.' And she says, 'Well, you're not supposed—she can sit back there but you have to come to the front.' So, he pulled the string that you pull to get off, and he says, 'Let me off right here on this corner. I will never get on a trolley again.' And he didn't.”²⁴

²³ Key West Writers Program, *San Carlos Institute*. University of Florida, PK Yonge Library Special Collections, 237.

²⁴ Lydia Lopez Allen, interview by Susan Greenbaum, African Americans in Florida Project, Special Collections, University of South Florida, July 9, 1994, 19.

Lopez notes that Ybor City was more tolerant than the rest of Tampa but other personal accounts noted similar discrimination in the Cuban enclave. Segregation became the norm in movie theaters, tennis courts, pools, and other recreational settings. Evelio Grillo, who grew up in Ybor City, recalled that “I always felt strange when I passed the Cuban movie theater. I could not attend it. But some cousins who were light enough to 'pass' attended the movie house weekly. Their darker brothers never even tried to seek admission.”²⁵ Like Jim Crow in other areas, the restrictions were demoralizing for Cubans of color. Residents like Sylvia Griñan experienced considerable difficulty in explaining Jim Crow restrictions to her children. She noted that “When we couldn't sit at the lunch counters to eat and couldn't go to the white theaters, I was constantly lying to my kids so they wouldn't feel inferior.”²⁶

One of the unexpected sites of racial division were labor unions. Dating back to the 1880s, Key West and Ybor City were the scene of experiments in anarchist and socialist-leaning labor organizations. Ybor City's *La Resistencia* boasted several thousand members and recruited not only cigar makers but all workers. These organizations centered their critiques of the social order on the basis of class and went out of their way to make overtures to black Cuban workers. *La Resistencia* was perhaps the most powerful but also the last organization of its type. By the beginning of the twentieth century, vigilante committees were instrumental in breaking up the more radical labor unions in Southern Florida. This became an opening for the Cigar Makers International Union, an affiliate of the American Federation of Labor, to recruit in Southern Florida. The CMIU focused more on bread-and-butter unionism and eschewed the more radical elements of Florida's Cuban unions. Like other AFL unions, the CMIU was notoriously reticent

²⁵ Evelio Grillo, *Black Cuban, Black American: A Memoir* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2000), 30.

²⁶ *St. Petersburg Times*, February 25, 1990.

in recruiting black workers. As one Cuban remembered, “black cigarmakers always opposed the union recognition...Because union recognitions, as blacks knew it then, always meant the expulsion of blacks from any position. The unions were not in favor of giving blacks any kind of recognition...or anything for blacks. It was for the white people.”²⁷

In cases where the legal system did not do enough, some Floridians were willing to enforce social customs by the use or threat of violence. The appearance of Ku Klux Klan chapters in Southern Florida by the 1920's speaks to this development.²⁸ The Klan used vigilante tactics in both Ybor City and Key West to support their vision of “100% Americanism.”²⁹ The strength of the Klan's Florida chapters rested on their support from prominent citizens. The 1921 charter for Key West's chapter listed many of the city's most powerful men. Members like J. Vining Harris Jr. and J.Y. Porter Jr. represented some of the most prominent families in Key West.³⁰ They and their families had ties to the school board, local judges, the police department and nearly every other major institution in Key West. The same was true of Tampa and its surrounding areas. The KKK in the Tampa Bay area were especially active in intimidating Cubans of color that dated outside of their race. Lydia Lopez recalled that “in Cuba that's nothing, for a black man to marry, or white man to marry a black woman and all that, you know.

²⁷ Francisco Rodriguez Sr., interview by Fred Beaton and Otis Anthony, 27-28.

²⁸ For more on the Ku Klux Klan and its role in Florida, see Michael Newton, *The Invisible Empire: The Ku Klux Klan in Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001); Stetson Kennedy, *The Klan Unmasked* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010).

²⁹ Klan of the Keys No. 42 to Mrs. Claudy Sawyer, June 30, 1924, Florida History Department at the Monroe County Public Library.

³⁰ Klan of the Keys Charter, February 26, 1921, Florida History Department at the Monroe County Public Library.

You would have seen couples like that, but not in Palmetto Beach. In fact, the KKK used to meet at Desota Park.”³¹ The connection between the KKK and prominent citizens was used to hinder interracial mingling and radicalism. As one worker recalled about the KKK’s efforts to end an Ybor City strike, “One time the Ku Klux Klan paraded through Ybor City to break up a strike. Everybody just got their shot guns and came out and sat on the perch with their guns and watched the parade. It sure was a quiet parade, and it didn’t last very long... The Klan don’t want no talk of communism going on. Neither do the factory owners, sheriff, police, or judges. They all work together, just like that.”³²

The KKK became a regular disturbance in Cuban communities. Motorcades of KKK members, from both within Tampa and from nearby towns, would drive through Cuban communities in night raids. In 1923, three men were abducted from Ybor City and severely beaten. This occurred in the middle of the Prohibition era and was done against perceived violators in Ybor City. All three men were given letters that were signed in Spanish as “*Que Que Que*” which phonetically reads as KKK. In both Key West and Ybor City, the KKK kidnapped, assaulted, and in the case of Manuel Cabeza, murdered citizens that were seen as committing immoral acts. The KKK was also able to do this with impunity because of the broad support they enjoyed among the Anglo community. Reflecting on a meeting of the electric cross in 1923, Tony Pizzo noted that “The number of women and children in the crowd attests to the social acceptability of the Klan among its constituency. This is a family event, combining modern

³¹ Lydia Lopez Allen, interview by Susan Greenbaum, African Americans in Florida Project, Special Collections, University of South Florida, July 9, 1994, 20.

³² Enrique and Amanda, interview by Stetson Kennedy and Adolpha Pellate, Folklore Project, Life Histories, Works Progress Administration, January 3, 1939, 12.

technology and traditional symbolism (the electric cross) in its arcane and at the same time public rituals.”³³

Black Cubans: Two Cultures at the Same Time

Black Cubans became awkwardly situated between the Cuban and African American experience in Southern Florida. In Cuba, black Cubans were afforded a minimum set of rights that were denied to them in the United States. Racial divisions were readily apparent in Cuba following independence, but Cubans played an important role in politics and the national identity of the country. Cuba's national debates about race spilled over into Florida and they underscored the relative lack of power that black Cubans enjoyed in émigré communities. Conversely, black Cubans began to reflect the experience of African Americans in Florida. As Jim Crow discrimination and residential segregation became entrenched, black Cubans were forced into relationships with African Americans. There were definite obstacles in this transition. Initially, black Cubans viewed themselves as fundamentally different from African Americans with unique histories and cultural characteristics. However, the realities of American discrimination led to cooperation and personal relationships among the two communities.

Local politicians and some white Cubans used events like Cuba's Little Race War of 1912 to cast suspicion on black Cubans. In 1908, a group of military veterans in Cuba formed the Independent Party of Color (PIC) that was dedicated to achieving greater political and social inclusion for black Cubans. The uproar was immediate. The PIC spoke to an old division over debates about Cuba's racial democracy. The aforementioned Martin Morua Delgado and Juan

³³ Tony Pizzo, Undated note, Special Collections, University of South Florida. Tony Pizzo Collection, Box 51, Folder Ku Klux Klan.

Gualberto Gomez represented two sides of an ideological divide that existed for decades. Morua eschewed racial politics and argued that the importance of Cuban nationality superseded any claims to race. Conversely, Gualberto was a proponent of challenging racism head on and believed in the use of black Cuban institutions to eradicate racism. Gualberto opposed the founding of the PIC but the group spoke to many of the same issues of alienation and discrimination that Gualberto fought against. In response to the PIC's founding, Morua successfully lobbied for a law that forbid the organization of political parties on the basis of race. The PIC, led by Evaristo Estenoz, launched an armed revolt in 1912 against the Cuban government in the Oriente province. The Cuban government, backed by the United States' intervention, quelled the rebellion in a matter of months.³⁴ Cubans of color in both Cuba and Southern Florida had mixed reactions to the revolt with some ardently supporting the movement while many others denounced it as a fringe movement with sparse support.

The formation of the PIC and the subsequent rebellion were used to cast Florida's black Cubans as suspicious and potentially traitorous. When the PIC was first formed, Tampa's *Diario de Tampa* reported that “The race of color is going to the elections of November 14th organized against whites, and a black military republic will likely lead to another Haiti.”³⁵ The invocation of the Haitian Revolution was a common trope throughout the Western hemisphere and was used in Southern Florida to raise suspicion of potential traitors in Key West and Ybor City. This

³⁴ For more on the PIC and Cuba's Little Race War, see Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Louis A. Pérez, Jr., “Politics, Peasants, and People of Color: The 1912 'Race War' in Cuba Reconsidered,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 66, no. 3 (August 1986): 509-539.

³⁵ *Diario de Tampa*, September 22, 1908.

suspicion was exacerbated by Estenoz's many criticisms of the United States and its lynching epidemic. By the time of the 1912 Race War, tensions were palpable in Southern Florida. Black Cubans were associated with a variety of plots and the suspicion among Americans and white Cubans veered into the fanatical. One Florida paper noted that the Oriente-based uprising had potentially spread to Havana. The newspaper argued that this could be seen by the absence of black Cubans from their traditional haunts and an increasing number of black Cubans ordering knives at hardware stores.³⁶ Evaristo Alfonso, identified by the *Key West Morning Journal* as a “loyal mulatto,” was involved in a confrontation with Disdiero Sola (“a colored Cuban”) shortly after Estenoz's rebellion started. The confrontation ended with Alfonso pulling out his pistol and shooting Sola. The newspaper noted that “The trouble between the two men is a result of the revolution in Cuba and is said to have been brewing for several days. It seems that Alfonso...had taken a stand for the administration in Cuba, and was being severely criticized by several of the colored Cuban colony in this city among whom was Sola.”³⁷ Rumors about black Cubans became so widespread that black Cubans in Key West organized a public meeting to confront claims that they were helping fund the PIC's army. One member of Union Cubana, a black Cuban organization, was forced to bring his financial records to prove he was not funneling money to the Cuban rebels. In a rare show of solidarity, an unidentified group of white Cubans attended the meeting to defend the reputation of some of the Cubans in question.³⁸

The controversy in Florida surrounding the Little Race War shows how black Cubans were routinely forced into compromising positions. Racial injustice was a basic reality for any

³⁶ *Key West Citizen*, June 5, 1912.

³⁷ *Key West Citizen*, June 13, 1912.

³⁸ *Key West Morning Journal*, June 11, 1912.

black resident of Southern Florida. Compared to African Americans, black Cubans enjoyed greater economic stability because of the cigar industry but they were still victims of systemic and daily discrimination. On one side, they were viewed with scorn by white Americans that considered them as more akin to African Americans than the Italian, Spanish, and white Cuban population in Florida. In this narrative, black Cubans and African Americans were residents prone to disruption and insurrection. On the other end, they received scant support from white Cubans. The common position among the Cuban community was that claims of racial discrimination were in themselves acts of racism. Relationships remained cordial at work but rarely extended outside of the factory. In this context, black Cubans had limited power to confront racism and find allies.

Over time, black Cubans began to identify with the experience of African Americans in Southern Florida. Many black Cubans wished to keep to themselves but Jim Crow realities forced alternatives. Cubans of color sometimes created institutions like the Union Martí-Maceo to sustain themselves, but they frequently had to use black institutions that were operated by African Americans. Medical assistance in both Key West and Ybor City became increasingly segregated during the early twentieth century. A flu epidemic broke out in Southern Florida in 1919 that deeply affected cigar factories. A 1919 *Tobacco Leaf* report noted that the “Centro Asturiano Club building has been converted into an emergency hospital, as has the Circulo Cubano Club. The San Marco club house, or colored club, is today being fitted up for an emergency hospital for colored people.”³⁹ The segregation in hospitals, schools, clothing stores,

³⁹ “Many Factories Have Been Closed,” *Tobacco Leaf*, 1918. Special Collections, University of South Florida. Tony Pizzo Collection, Box 27, Folder Cuban Club.

and a host of other spaces led to an increasing familiarity between African Americans and Cubans of color. Over time, race became more important than ethnicity in these relationships.

Jim Crow laws fostered fruitful albeit complicated relationships between African Americans and Cubans of color. Jim Crow segregation united African Americans and black Cubans in schools, theaters, and other segregated institutions. As writers like Grillo have noted, profound differences existed between African Americans and black Cubans. Religion, customs, and language served as a frequent barrier between the two sides that frequently viewed each other with suspicion. However, “other realities—such as play, school, work, friendships, love, sex, and marriage—bonded young black Cubans to black Americans.”⁴⁰ The life of Francisco Rodriguez Jr. serves as another example of this phenomenon. The son of cigar making parents, he left Ybor City and attended college at the University of Pennsylvania in the 1930s. After serving in World War II, he became a lawyer in Florida. Working in concert with the NAACP, he filed dozens of cases regarding educational discrimination throughout the state. Recalling his life experiences, he noted that “I think the two most prominent influences in my life is the fact that I am a black Latin. That means a whole lot because I lived in two cultures at the same time.” People like Grillo and Rodriguez Jr. were fully aware of their heritage but were also more attuned to the similarities among black Americans in a way that was lost on their parents.

White Cubans and Nascent Cuban Americans

While black Cubans were being marginalized alongside African Americans, white Cubans began to craft an identity centered on their industrious qualities and allegiance to the United States. This was accomplished on various fronts. White Cubans began to attach

⁴⁰ Grillo, *Black Cuban, Black American*, 11.

themselves to American causes, formed political alliances with Americans, Spaniards, and Italians, and kept their relationships with black Cubans limited to the workplace. Charting this dramatic shift from multiracial alliances to Jim Crow segregation is a layered problem. In the past, scholars of these communities have pointed to Jim Crow as forcing white Cubans to separate from black Cubans. This is certainly true to some degree but as Winston James has noted, this analysis is too simplistic.⁴¹ It negates the role of white Cubans as historical actors and leaves unexamined how older racial perceptions could explain the separation of white and black Cubans. Under further inspection, it is more likely that the racial cooperation experienced in Southern Florida was a fleeting historical exception. An examination of white Cubans and their own actions points to a racial separation that was the norm in Cuban history. In the aftermath, white Cubans formed new alliances and identities that suited their purpose as Cuban Americans.

During the early twentieth century, a period of intense nativism, many Cubans aligned themselves with American causes. One of the fundamental sites of this experience was in educational institutions. A report on the San Carlos in Key West noted that its students “are taught to be good Cuban-Americans—to become Americanized and yet to maintain their cultural identity as Cubans and Spanish-speaking people. They are taught to be proud of their race, language, and culture—and they sing the national anthems of both the United States and Cuba.”⁴² A similar report from the Circulo Cubano in Ybor City created an Americanization

⁴¹ James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, 250-251.

⁴² Key West Writers Program, *San Carlos Institute*, undated. University of Florida, PK Yonge Library Special Collections, 237.

class that “instructs foreign born in duties of citizenship.”⁴³ The Methodist Church made similar appeals to Cubans. The Wolff Mission School in Ybor City and the Ruth Hargrove Institute in Key West instructed white American and Cuban children. The Hargrove Institute, where 1/3 of students were Cuban, noted that “These people bring with them the customs, mental attitudes, and religion of their own country: but when they have come in touch with our home mission schools, they have taken back a vision of a larger life for their own people.”⁴⁴ By disassociating from Cubans of color and making overtures towards being more American, white Cubans hoped to occupy the “respectable” rungs of society. As Silvia Griñan recalled, “When the white Cubans started getting Americanized, they became more like the white Americans in their attitudes toward blacks, including black Cubans.”⁴⁵

In Ybor City, white Cubans began to be grouped alongside other white immigrants. Italians and Spaniards made up a substantial portion of Ybor City's population by the end of the nineteenth century. All three groups worked in Tampa's cigar factories and although they had their respective mutual-aid societies, there was a great deal of camaraderie between the *Circulo Cubano*, *L'Unione Italiana*, *El Centro Espanol*, and the *Centro Asturiano*. These groups became known as the “Latin” community of Ybor City. Black Cubans were technically part of this category but for practical purposes, they were left out of the solidarity that the term denoted. The nineteenth-century tensions between Cubans and Spaniards gave way to a period of reconciliation and friendship during the twentieth century. As one Cuban writer noted, “It is

⁴³ “Americanization Class Here Instructs Foreign Born in Duties of Citizenship,” Unknown and undated publication. Special Collections, University of South Florida. Tony Pizzo Collection, Box 27, Folder Cuban Club.

⁴⁴ R.W. Macdonell, “Our Cuban Work,” *Missionary Voice* 1, no. 4 (April 1911): 47-48.

⁴⁵ *Tampa Tribune*, September 14, 1977.

certain that Cubans and Spaniards should desire to be united...because it seems to me that neither of the two nations could be content if the other does not share in its happiness.”⁴⁶ Similar support was given to L'Unione Italiana and their events were regularly advertised in Ybor's Cuban newspapers. Black Cubans were almost completely barred from this degree of cooperation. On occasions where the Circulo Cubano asked for representatives from Marti-Maceo, black Cubans were unsure how to respond. As one member recalled, “Many of them [Marti-Maceo members] didn't want to go. They'd say [to me], 'You go 'cause you're the lightest one and you can go.' The dark ones didn't want to go.”⁴⁷

This is not to say that white Cubans, particular working-class Cubans, were not the occasional victims of discrimination. There have been various accounts of the tensions between Cuban residents of Southern Florida and the Anglo population. As Gary Mormino and George Pozzetta have noted, “Over time, the most strongly held Anglo attitudes tended to oscillate in accordance with the fortunes of the cigar industry.”⁴⁸ White Cubans were at times discriminated against but they had the political capital to check some of these infractions. In 1914, Tampa's Goldstein's Pool posted a notice saying “Cubans Not Admitted.” There was an immediate outrage from the Cuban community. The Cuban Consul’s Ralph Ybor went as far as to threaten legal action and presented the information to the Department of Justice. The manager of Goldstein's Pool clarified that “the notice was intended for the 'riff-raff,' and not for the better

⁴⁶ *Diario de Tampa*, July 9, 1908.

⁴⁷ Greenbaum, *More than Black*, 191.

⁴⁸ Gary Ross Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their Latin Neighbors in Tampa, 1885-1985*, (Gainesville, FL, 1998), 242.

class of Cubans.”⁴⁹ The pool's response speaks to the layers of race and class considerations that took place in Cuban enclaves. Similarly, in 1908 a performer at the Pathe Theater launched into a series of insults against the Cuban population in Ybor City. Local Cuban newspapers were in an uproar and the theater's management published a formal apology in local newspapers.⁵⁰ The Anglo population could murmur displeasure about white Cubans in Southern Florida but to do so publicly was still cause for being publicly shamed. White Cubans had the political and economic clout to ensure that these slights were addressed. The same cannot be said for insults lobbed against Cubans of color.

On the other end of the spectrum, wealthy white Cubans were especially prone to associate with white Americans. Wealthy Cubans often moved into other areas of Tampa, intermarried with white families, and joined organizations that were exclusive to white members. A typical example of this was Judge Angel de Lono. De Lono was born in Santiago de Cuba and fled the island after discovering that Spanish officials intended to arrest him. An ardent supporter of Cuban independence, he helped design some of the first filibuster expeditions from the United States to Cuba. After Cuban independence, he remained in Key West and worked as a Monroe County judge. De Lono was president of a local Cuban educational society, member of the Cuban Democratic Club, and served as a grand master of the Florida Odd Fellows. He was survived by two daughters who both married into American families.⁵¹ Carlo Recio's family had a similar story. Recio was born in Puerto Principe and arrived in Key West in 1872. A man of

⁴⁹ “Tampa Passes the Million a Day Mark,” *Tobacco Leaf*, 1914. Special Collections, University of South Florida. Tony Pizzo Collection, Box 28, Folder Cuban and Cuban Americans.

⁵⁰ *El Diario de Tampa*, November 17, 1908.

⁵¹ “Death of a Prominent Florida Odd Fellow,” *The Bundle of Sticks*, August, 1893.

meager means, he eventually saved enough money to buy his own grocery store which became very successful. He was a Mason, an Odd Fellow, and a member of St. Paul's Episcopal Church. Recio and his wife Emeline had three daughters: Emelina Teresa, Estella Rebecca, and Herminia. Respectively, they married John Alexander Hayes, Policarp Artman, and Joseph Lancelot Lester.⁵² The institutional affiliations and intermarrying trends seen in the Recio and De Lono families were also apparent in other elite Cuban families.

American politicians also understood the benefit of aligning with elite Cuban families. One of the most powerful men in Tampa was D.B. McKay. His grandfather and uncle had previously served as mayors of Tampa, and he himself would become mayor in 1910. In addition to his political appointment, he also owned the *Tampa Times*, one of two major English newspapers in the city. In 1900, he married Aurora Gutierrez, the daughter of cigar manufacturer Gavino Gutierrez. As one writer noted, this "broadened his civic and social ties to include part of the Latin community."⁵³ Indeed, the support of the Cuban population often swung many close elections. However, political participation in Tampa existed within a system of black disenfranchisement. Aside from being elected in 1910, McKay also founded the White Municipal Party in the same year. The Party existed to ensure that black voters were barred from participating in Democratic primaries. In a city led entirely by Democrats, this essentially barred black residents from having a voice in local politics. The White Municipal Party would be a

⁵² "Carlos Recio," Unknown and undated publication. Florida History Department at the Monroe County Public Library.

⁵³ Pam Iorio, "Colorless Primaries: Tampa's White Municipal Party," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 79, no. 3 (Winter 2001): 300.

dominant political force for decades. Cubans were a fervent part of local politics in the twentieth century and supported many of the candidates borne out of the party.

Reverting to Old Bigotry

Following Cuban independence, white Cubans returned to many of the old assumptions about black Cubans. Charting this transition presents some difficulties. White Cubans were rarely direct in talking about their distancing from black Cubans. The few instances that do recall this narrative remember this period as an unfortunate time where Jim Crow forced white Cubans into separation. However, a look at Cuban attitudes and cultural markers allow for the possibility that white Cubans were merely falling back into older attitudes about black Cubans rooted in well-established traditions. Ada Ferrer, in her analysis of the Cuban independence movement in Cuba, noted that many of the issues that united all Cubans were tenuous. In a “raceless” movement, critiques from Cubans of color were seen as anti-revolutionary and fundamentally untrue. This created an environment where Cubans of color played a crucial role in the independence movement but were still second-class citizens. As Ferrer notes, “however compelling the image of an American-sponsored betrayal, it seems equally clear that the seeds of the revolution's undoing were present in the revolution itself: in old but changing anxieties about black power, in misgivings about black mobilization, in racialized assumptions about civilization and politics.”⁵⁴ In the period immediately after Cuban independence, much of these same trends can be seen in Southern Florida. Three decades of an independence movement were clearly not enough to undo centuries of racial conditioning.

⁵⁴ Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, 197.

In 1909, there was a rare, public debate over the discord between black and white Cubans in Florida. Various Cuban senators had earlier proposed apportioning funds to émigré communities in Southern Florida for the purpose of funding local schools. In local newspapers, a debate raged between Eliseo Pérez Diaz and Jose A. Lopez. Specifically, Lopez argued that it would be unconstitutional for Cubans in Florida to receive the funds given the segregated nature of their schools. Pérez generally dodged discussing the racial disparities in Florida and attempted to insist that failing to fund the schools would hurt all Cubans, black and white alike. However, as Lopez asserted:

I do not understand, as you understand my good friend, how Cubans can violate the constitutional principles of his country, much less, in the case of public instruction, when you know that the school is where we begin to form the criteria of being a good citizen, and if schools that reside within the territorial limits of the Republic teach to its youth that the Republic does not recognize racial difference in the enjoyment of benefits that these both, black and white, should attend the same schools and receive the same education; There is no justifiable reason why, to children who are educated in schools abroad, paid for by the government, using the same texts and proclaiming the same principles of democracy, be taught from the beginning, that they will not only form a standard completely different from those in Cuban schools, but one that is even antagonistic.”⁵⁵

Pérez, in response, argued that Cuban senators needed to understand “how things are here” and that segregated schools were the norm in the state and the United States. Fittingly, Pérez would

⁵⁵ *Diario de Tampa*, May 29, 1909.

go on to cite Booker T. Washington's 1895 Atlanta Compromise Speech in claiming that the wise understand that the “agitation of questions of social equality is the extremist folly, and that progress in the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing.”⁵⁶

The Pérez-Lopez debate underscored the delicate, illusory nature of the Cuban independence movement's ideals and the rapidity with which white Cubans abandoned those ideals in the United States. Many historians have written about the use of racial democracy in Cuba and many other Latin American countries that articulated a raceless vision of society that united a wide array of citizens. Most historians have been quick to view Cuba's attempts at integrating black Cubans as hopelessly flawed and bigoted. Under this argument, black Cubans continued to operate in the lower rungs of society and could not accuse Cubans of racial discrimination in fear of being accused as racists themselves. However, Alejandro de la Fuente has shown that because racial democracy was viewed as a core tenet of the Cuban republic, black Cubans could claim a legitimate place in Cuban politics and culture. He has argued that “Regardless of how racist many Cuban whites were, it was difficult for them to translate their anti-black prejudices into openly discriminatory practices.”⁵⁷ This sentiment is echoed in Pérez's argument. As a result, black Cubans had a forceful moral and political argument for their place in Cuban society. In Southern Florida, white Cubans were not beholden to the same standard. The beginning of the twentieth century was marked by growing racial antagonisms throughout the American South. Black Americans were viewed, inherently, as second-class citizens. Under this framework, white Cubans were not under any particular obligation to uphold Latin American

⁵⁶ *Diario de Tampa*, June 2, 1909.

⁵⁷ De la Fuente, “Myths of Racial Democracy,” 67.

ideas on race. Casting judgment in this case is difficult. It is clear that there were real social and sometimes violent consequences to violating Jim Crow segregation. With that said, it is still stark to see the relative silence among white Cubans on the issue of race in Florida. Combating racial injustice was a core principle of the Cuban Republic, and with less than a generation removed from that struggle, white Cubans were unwilling to engage in a similar battle in the United States.

A legitimate argument could be made that the segregation seen in Southern Florida spoke to a historical norm in Cuban history. One possible way of glimpsing into the way white Cubans thought of race in post-independence Cuba is to observe the material culture they enjoyed. The San Carlos Institute in Key West and the Circulo Cubano in Ybor City were both central to Cuban culture and provided entertainment for the Anglo community as well. Both had ample theaters that hosted a variety of different performers. Some of the most heralded forms of entertainment were Teatro Bufo and the closely related American minstrelsy. Originating as a caricature-based theater in Spain, Teatro Bufo eventually became a Cuban style of comedic theater typically featuring performers in blackface. In 1925, the Arango-Moreno theater company planned a United States tour beginning with a series of shows at Key West's San Carlos Institute. Rafael de Arango was one of the most famous performers of Teatro Bufo and his performance was a big event in the city.⁵⁸ In addition to these types of performances, American minstrel shows were still popular. A 1912 ad in Key West noted the arrival of A.G. Allen's theater company and for their arrival “They will have a street parade tomorrow at noon followed

⁵⁸ Antonio López, *Unbecoming Blackness: The Diaspora Cultures of Afro-Cuban America*, (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 22.

by a band concert opposite the Hotel Jefferson.”⁵⁹ These characterizations of black Cubans were seen in nearly all forms of entertainment.

Sorting through the Circulo Cubano's collection of plays, the collection is rife with black characters that are used as humorous props. A typical example can be found in Mario Sorondo's *La Mujer del Buzo*. The protagonist, Pepe, is frequently joined by his black servant, Panchito. They are generally friendly to one another, but in a moment of anger, Pepe declares, “Well, it's over and stop playing around. You cannot deny that you are the descendent of Lucumi's and Congo's. Do as I say and shut your mouth.”⁶⁰ One of the running jokes in the play involves linking Panchito to his African heritage. Panchito frequently protests and reminds other characters in the play that his father's ancestors were French and that his maternal grandmother was from Galicia.

The humor in Cuban plays underscores the problem facing Cubans of color at the turn of the century. White Cubans, regardless of ancestry, could always claim legitimacy as Cubans in Southern Florida. Black Cubans, conversely, were forever linked to their African heritage. In an article on Ybor City, one writer described black Cubans by regional African differences. Lucumis were “proud, quick and sensitive” that practiced black magic while the Carabali were “economical and independent” but were also “ñañigos” that practiced voodoo and sparked racial conflict.⁶¹ Ñañigos were members of Abakuá, a secret society of black Cubans with origins in

⁵⁹ *Key West Citizen*, February 18, 1912.

⁶⁰ Mario Sorondo, *La Mujer del Buzo*. Special Collections, University of South Florida. Cuban Club Collection, Box 32.

⁶¹ “A Study of the Typical Cuban Family in Ybor City.” Special Collections, University of South Florida. Tony Pizzo Collection, Box 34, Folder Folklore, 4-5.

West Africa. Their secretive practices led to portrayals of black Cubans being associated with cults and violence. In a profile of the society among Tampa's black Cubans, the author noted that the society "has a long and evil history. It originated in the jungles of Africa as 'Voodoo', or devil-worship, and was brought to the New World by negro slaves."⁶² These caricatures of African people were coupled with Jim Crow characters in Southern Florida. *La Revista*, a periodical published in Tampa, regularly included these portrayals of young black boys eating watermelon for comic effect, cartoons of *ñañigos* in Florida, and other broad portrayals meant to make black people the object of fantasy and ridicule. In Antonio Lopez's *Unbecoming Blackness*, he devotes a chapter to Alberto O'Farrill, a black Cuban and actor on the Teatro Bufo circuit. He arrived in Key West in 1925 on a steamship that was also carrying fellow Cuban, Luis Alfaro. The shipping records marked Alfaro's "Race/Ethnicity" as Cuban while O'Farrill was labeled as "African." As Lopez explains, "Unlike his fellow passenger, a 'Cuban' twice over in terms of 'nationality' and 'race or people'--a doubling with multiple implications: it subsumes Cuban whiteness under 'Cuban race'...O'Farrill's identity is both Cuban and excessive to Cuba: he is a 'citizen or subject' of the Cuban nation-state who also belongs to an 'African race,' an 'African people.'⁶³

White Cubans developed a view of a particular racial hierarchy that generally looked down on black Cubans. These views were a complex amalgam of the United States' racial history, Cuban prejudice, and American nativism. For these nascent Cuban Americans, black Cubans were on the bottom rung. Italians were better but not by much and associating and

⁶² *Ñañigo*, May 26, 1936, (Federal Writers' Project of the Work Projects Administration for the State of Florida), 1. Special Collections, University of South Florida. Tony Pizzo Collection, Box 34, Folder Folklore.

⁶³ López, *Unbecoming Blackness*, 22.

marrying into a white or Cuban family was ideal. The WPA interviews of Stetson Kennedy provide a fascinating glimpse into this hierarchy. While most WPA sessions in Southern Florida were first person life histories, Kennedy's interviews tended to be lengthy profiles that spanned several days and provided a glimpse into everyday conversation and views on life, family, and politics. One of his interviews profiled a couple identified simply as Pedro and Estrella. In talking about their neighborhood, they provide a look into the complex and convoluted racial conceptions that white Cubans possessed. Commenting on a racially mixed family in the neighborhood, Estrella mentioned that "You may not believe it...but that Negro woman is that white-looking kid's mother. They are all colored people in that house—they are very nice people, too. Those kids all have a good time playing together during the holidays. The colored kids, even the white-looking ones, have to go to separate schools."⁶⁴ This defined a great deal about the relationships white Cubans shared with black Cubans and African Americans. They could be civil with them, maybe even interact with them at work, but they still seemed foreign and very different in the American context. When a young woman with a dark complexion walked by, Estrella wondered aloud "Is she a Negro?" Pedro responded "No, her mother is Cuban; I don't guess her own mother knows who her father is. She looks like a Puerto Rican—I guess there was some jumping the fence." Estrella's critiques of the woman, that she was reckless and sexually promiscuous, were common tropes of black Cubans and African Americans. In the end, Estrella declared "I sure wouldn't change places with her."⁶⁵ The muddled concepts of "Negro," Cuban, and respectability are on full display in these sessions.

⁶⁴ Pedro and Estrella, interview by Stetson Kennedy, Folklore Project, Life Histories, Works Progress Administration, January 1, 1939, 18.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 20.

In another session with a couple identified as Enrique and Amanda, Kennedy's interview explores dating and the relationship between being Cuban and American. In an earlier part of the piece, Amanda is having a discussion with her daughter Rosa and her relationship to an Italian boy. Amanda exhorted, "I don't want no Italian son-in-law in the family...I don't see why you can't marry a Cuban or an American—anything but an Italian."⁶⁶ It would have been interesting to see if a black Cuban fit under Amanda's definition of a "Cuban" suitable of marrying her daughter. Rosa insisted that Nicky, the Italian boy, was kind and handsome. She also insisted that she would gladly date an American boy but that this presented difficulties. Rosa noted that "I do like Americans...sure! But I can't do nothing about it. The only way to get Americans is to be high-toned and live in Hyde Park and I can't do that."⁶⁷ For many working-class Cubans in Ybor City and Key West, moving up in the world was in part a function of what you did for a living but also your familial relationships—in this context, dating white Americans provided one such pathway to upward mobility for white Cubans. This underscored the complex relationships that younger Cuban Americans had in sharing allegiances to their Cuban heritage and the country they were raised in. In another exchange between Amanda and Rosa, Amanda declared that although she is of Cuban heritage, she was born in Key West and is as American as anyone else. Rosa replied by saying that "Real American people consider you a Cuban." Indignant, Amanda asserted "Heck yeah, I'm an American—ain't I on the WPA?"⁶⁸ Amanda's certainty of her American identity speaks to the many ways that white Cubans began to assert their own sense of belonging. But Rosa was also right. Cubans during this period were something in-between; they

⁶⁶ Enrique and Amanda, interview by Stetson Kennedy and Adolpha Pellate, 3-4.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 4.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 5-6.

were too Cuban to be American and were too detached from Cuba to be Cuban. In these passing comments and seemingly harmless observations, you can sense how Cubans used race and ethnicity as a way of defining their view of a successful family and life.

Conclusion

In a mere two decades, the life of black Cubans in Southern Florida changed in fundamental ways. In the late nineteenth century, black Cubans worked alongside white Cubans in cigar factories, mutual-aid societies, and independence groups. Prejudice continued to take on many forms but a central mission of Cuban independence was the creation of a more equal, integrated society; both Key West and Ybor City served as a model for this type of structure. Black Cubans were not just the militaristic symbols of the Cuban army but intellectuals, writers, journalists, *lectors*, and respected professionals. With racial equality as a bedrock principle of the independence movement, the discussion of race became public and ongoing in halls like the Instituto San Carlos and the Circulo Cubano. However, beginning with the end of the nineteenth century, this relationship changed dramatically. Cuban independence certainly served as a break in the development of both Key West and Ybor City. In particular, many of the most prominent Cubans of color that resided in Southern Florida moved back to Cuba after 1898—Martin Morua Delgado, Guillermo Sorondo, and Manuel and Joaquin Sorondo were among the many Cubans of color who returned to the island in an attempt to build the type of society that they modeled in Southern Florida. The prominent Cubans of color that stayed, such as the Pedroso's and Bruno Roig were few and far between.⁶⁹ To add to this difficulty, labor unions no longer offered refuge to black Cubans by the early twentieth century. The anarchist-inspired unions of Key West and

⁶⁹ Greenbaum, *More than Black*, 106.

Ybor City that insisted on the inclusion of black Cubans, were broken by vigilantism and replaced by the more segregated CMIU. But many other factors explained the waning role of black Cubans in Southern Florida's cigar towns. The historical biases of Cuban culture coupled with Jim Crow segregation ultimately led to the creation of separate spheres for black and white Cubans.

The frail interracial bonds fostered in Southern Florida are also a reflection of the limits of the Cuban independence movement. From the beginning, the Cuban independence movement was an amalgam of constituencies. The most prominent supporters of the Ten Years War tended to be wealthier and did not necessarily support the abolition of slavery. As the war continued, the movement grew more diverse and reached the point where black Cubans were an invaluable part of Cuba's independence mission. However, these bonds were temporary in many respects. They were sustained during the independence movement, but they were more malleable in the period after 1898. Just as the newly formed Cuban republic struggled to incorporate black Cubans into society, the struggles of black Cubans in Florida were even greater. In this context, the white Cubans that stayed in Southern Florida began to align themselves with American causes, marry into American families, and form coalitions with Spaniards and Italians. White Cubans were able to achieve many of the privileges of white citizenship while still maintaining some allegiance to Cuban culture.

The fate of black Cubans was largely decided by Jim Crow segregation. Changes to Florida law in the late nineteenth century underscored future challenges that black Cubans would face. Southern racism was generally geared towards African Americans, but at the turn of the century, black Cubans became increasingly viewed as being equals with African Americans. Black Cubans attended separate theaters, schools, hospitals, and recreational spaces. In response,

black Cubans looked to each other and their new neighbors. In their own community, they formed societies like La Union Marti-Maceo to cater to the needs of the black Cuban community, maintain their traditions, and project an image of professional respectability. Younger generations of black Cubans also began to form relationships with African Americans. Their differences were many but the realities of Southern racism brought them together as they formed lasting friendships, marriages, and professional relationships.

Conclusion - From Radical Outposts to Tourist Attractions

In the heart of Ybor City, situated on 8th avenue, stands a beautiful, multi-level brick structure fashioned in the mold of the town's old cigar factories. The centerpiece is a large lighted sign that reads "Centro Ybor." In between the words is a classic rendering of a cigar label—a dark-haired woman adorns the image, staring intently, a single rose in her hair. Under the sign reads "Muvico Theaters 20." In its current form, Centro Ybor is a multi-purpose entertainment center housing a theater, a comedy club, dozens of restaurants, and office space. Hang around long enough and you will see a bright yellow street car come to a stop in front of the complex. The street cars, designed to resemble the same cars that *Tampeños* rode in from 1892 until their closure in 1946, arrive about every 20 minutes, tourists and local commuters in tow. The area is but a slice of the eleven blocks of Ybor City's Historic District, classified as a United States National Historic Landmark District in 1974. The district boasts nearly 1,000 historically preserved buildings harkening back to Ybor City's heyday. Bakeries, churches, schools, mutual-aid societies, *casitas*, and even a few cigar factories have retained their architectural integrity with many being repurposed as retail spaces, museums, or offices. Vicente Ybor's original cigar factory in Ybor City, spanning an entire city block, stands fully restored along 13th Street. Aside from serving as one of the largest cigar factories in the world during the late nineteenth century, it was on that factory floor that Jose Martí lectured during his first visit to Tampa in 1891. After Ybor passed away in 1896, the factory went through many phases. The complex has been a cigar factory for other manufacturers, a gallery space for artists, an office building, and has been vacant for several stretches of time. In 2010, the building was purchased by the Church of Scientology. The Church has kept some of the original quirks of the factory.

Strewn about the building are a tobacco press, a lector's chair, and various other items that speak to the city's Cuban history and the town's signature industry.¹

The Ybor City Historic District is in many ways a perfect entry point to analyze the legacy of the Clear Havana industry in Southern Florida and the selective history that has been embraced by a new generation of Floridians. In both Key West and Ybor City, museums, historical markers, and monuments adorn various areas of both cities pointing to the early Cuban history of the state. These public memorials are important, both for the stories they tell and for their notable silences. Walking through both towns, one would be hard pressed to imagine how these spaces, now dedicated to commerce and tourism, once supported revolution and radicalism. Key West and Ybor City both served as critical centers of the Cuban independence movement. Supporters in both cities helped fund and fight the three wars that led to Cuba's independence from Spain. It was in these towns that Cubans began to formulate a more egalitarian vision of Cuban independence and carved out spaces for women and black Cubans. In the same vein, both towns were shaped by cigarmaking, a skilled industry that bred a distinct working-class identity and labor unions that supported radical aims. This part of Southern Florida's history is buried amid more sanitized accounts that focus on a narrative centered on the American dream. These landmarks also obscure Southern Florida's murky racial history. Any tourist can now hop on Ybor City's street cars, but those cars were an essential part of the segregated legacy of Tampa's history. It was in those cars that many Cubans first learned about the racial code of the United States, the intricacies of passing, and the importance of light skin. Similarly, visitors to present-day Ybor City can all visit the *Circulo Cubano*, *L'Unione Italiana*, *El Centro Español* and the *Centro Asturiano*. These mutual-aid societies served as the backbone of the immigrant

¹ *Tampa Tribune*, July 30, 2013, <http://tbo.com/news/business/scientology-neighborly-in-ybor-20130730>.

communities of Cubans, Italians, and Spaniards. All four buildings have been splendidly restored to their original design and serve as important community spaces for Ybor's Latin community. Less clear is why *La Union Martí-Maceo*, the mutual-aid society that housed Ybor City's Cubans of color, is in an undistinguished modern building, the club's original building having been bulldozed in 1965.

The reasons for Southern Florida's distorted history are varied. The most obvious reason is that both Key West and Ybor City have changed considerably in terms of their demographics and economies. Cubans no longer dominate both cities—Key West and Ybor City are majority white and the Latino population is more diverse. In addition, both economies are no longer driven by manufacturing. The cigar industry was king in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but since then tourism and the service industry have played dominant roles in the economies of Southern Florida. The other key factor that has shaped the public history of early Cuban Florida has been the changing relationship between Cuba and the United States. Following the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, a very different wave of Cuban migration ensued. More conservative, and increasingly centered in Miami, the Cuban Americans of the middle and late twentieth century were fundamentally disconnected from the earlier waves of Cuban migration to Florida. These two broad shifts have led to the early history of Cuban Florida being told from a perspective that is reflective of Florida's tourism industry and the contemporary identity of Cuban Americans.

This chapter will look to provide a brief overview of the early Cuban history of Southern Florida and will then look to explore the demise of the cigar industry and the public history that now recalls the earlier Cuban period. The opening sections will revisit the major factors that shaped both cities. In particular, the Clear Havana industry and the Cuban independence

movement played a critical role in the founding of both communities and their long-term identity in the late nineteenth century. In the early twentieth century, both communities were primarily shaped by labor radicalism, government repression, and Jim Crow segregation. This will lead to a discussion of the factors that led to the cigar industry's collapse in Southern Florida. Spurred by the rise of automation and the cigarette, the cigar industry crumbled in Key West and Ybor City. Workers in both cities either switched professions or moved north to other areas of the eastern seaboard. This ushered in a transition period where the economies and demographics of both cities changed dramatically. Beginning in the 1970s, I will then analyze how both cities have sought to preserve certain aspects of Southern Florida's Cuban history. Particular districts and structures have been preserved in a way that speaks to the type of image that each city wanted to exude. In this process, other aspects of Cuban American history have been left behind. I will then examine how recent efforts by residents and activists have been dedicated to painting a more comprehensive image of the Cuban history of Key West and Ybor City.

Key West

In the nineteenth century, Key West staked its claim as Florida's original Cuban exile center. Dating back to the mid-nineteenth century, Key West served as a site of filibustering for some of the earliest Cuban revolutionaries looking to overthrow the Spanish government and liberate Cuba. Following the outbreak of the Ten Years War in 1868, Key West became a permanent outpost of the Cuban insurgency. Cubans in Key West supported the independence movement by donating money to the war effort and becoming active members of the diverse émigré network in the United States. Cubans of Key West were particularly active members of the émigré press. Newspapers like *El Yara* and *El Republicano* were vital publications that kept Cuban exiles informed about developments in Cuba and also proved to be popular publications

amongst revolutionary sympathizers in Cuba. Prior to the arrival of Cubans, Key West was largely populated by Bahamians and American that mostly worked in maritime industries. Cubans propelled Key West into becoming the largest city in Florida and molded the town in their own image. The cigar industry was the largest employer, Spanish became the dominant language on the island, and Cubans began to carve out a place for themselves in American politics by serving as elected officials in state and local politics. The city stood as one of the most diverse and peculiar towns in the United States where Cubans, Bahamians, and Americans inhabited a city that was more Caribbean than American.

Central to Key West's identity was its place as a working-class enclave. With the Cuban population came a substantive percentage of the Cuban cigar industry. Motivated by cheaper production costs and a more stable environment, workers and manufacturers flocked to Key West by the thousands. The nature of cigar work played an important role in shaping their new home. Cigarmaking, by its very nature, brought together a diverse range of skills and people to produce what was a very lucrative product in the late nineteenth century. Dating back to its origins in Havana, the cigar factory brought together white and black Cubans during a period where many Cubans were still debating the role of slavery in society. As a result, prominent black Cubans like Martín Morua Delgado became essential members of Key West's Cuban community that actively challenged the status quo and the role of black Cubans in the Cuban insurgency. In a period where supporters of independence represented a wide range of views and goals, it was communities like Key West that pushed the issue of race to the forefront.

Key West also became a site of radical labor activism during the 1880s and 1890s. Shaped by the influence of Spanish anarchism in Havana, cigarmakers in Key West began to craft labor organizations that were actively antagonistic towards manufacturers and argued for

greater wages and control over their workplace. During this period, Key West benefited from close collaboration with cigarmakers in Ybor City and Havana. When workers in one city planned to strike, they worked with the other cigar centers to lessen the burden of prolonged battles. Workers in each city were responsible for gathering strike funds and also providing temporary employment for striking workers. Workers in Key West knew they could travel to Havana or Ybor City and find short-term work to wait out the strike. This type of coordination proved to be a valuable weapon that workers used for years.

By the early 1890s, Key West once again became a center of organizing for the independence movement. In concert with other émigré centers in the United States, Key West was an active participant in the *Partido Revolucionario Cubano* that served as an essential organizing committee for planning the Cuban War of Independence. By 1895, labor took a backseat to the immediate concerns over Cuba's future. For the next three years, Cubans in Key West helped plan, fund, and fight the final war of independence. The Clear Havana factories of Southern Florida were particularly volatile during this period. Aside from fluctuations in the labor pool, a temporary embargo on the export of Cuban tobacco left many factories with a limited supply of its critical raw good. Nevertheless, the war's conclusion marked the end of a 30 year struggle for Cuban independence.

Following the war, Key West's cigar factories resumed production with workers looking to once again engage in labor organizing. In 1905, Key West's cigarmakers engaged in a general strike that was brutally repressed by manufacturers and local city officials. Following a model that successfully quelled workers in Ybor City, manufacturers used their collective strength to combat the efforts of workers. Workers were forcefully evicted from their homes, attacked when they publicly protested, and some strike leaders were even forcefully deported from the island.

This marked one of the last large-scale efforts that Key West workers made in confronting manufacturers. In general, the Clear Havana industry began to decline during this period. An increasing number of manufacturers continued to move north, mostly to Ybor City, and worker's rights declined precipitously in the 1910s and 1920s.

In general, the Cuban community of Key West began to be divided in the early twentieth century. Chapter 3 discussed the career of James Dean as a way of showing how legislation aimed at repressing African Americans began to have consequences for black Cubans in the late nineteenth century. These cases, which largely focused on cohabitation and marriage, were rare but pointed to the future of race relations in Cuban communities. By the beginning of the twentieth century, segregation began to be strictly enforced in Key West. This was most notable in the *Instituto San Carlos* which had functioned as a key cultural institution for Cubans dating back to its inception in 1871. The institute was especially notable for its school which stood as one of the first racially integrated schools in the United States. By the early 1900s, the San Carlos and other institutions like it, were segregated. Cubans continued to work with one another in cigar factories but relationships were generally limited to the workplace. Recreational spaces, schools, hospitals, and mutual-aid societies became key points of division for the Cuban community. Coupled with the general decline of the cigar industry, Key West became untenable for many black Cubans who either moved north or relocated to Cuba. Other simply stayed, resigned to their fate. Pendas, near the end of his oral history, declared "I do not intend to leave, however, for I have lived here practically all my life and I intend to die with the cigar industry in Tampa."²

² Enrique Pendas interview by F. Valdes, Folklore Project, Life Histories, Works Progress Administration, 1935, 9.

Ybor City

Ybor City served as the giant of the Clear Havana industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Vicente Ybor, looking to avoid the labor troubles that began to plague him in Key West, sought to move his operation to a new city where he could have a clean start. Financially, the move made sense. Tampa was a city on the rise and a new railroad extension meant that the city was easily connected to the rest of the American mainland. Key West, decades away from receiving its own railway extension, was plagued by its relative isolation in the Florida Keys. Within a few years, Ybor was able to replicate his success in Tampa and his efforts emboldened other manufacturers to follow suit. Manufacturers from Key West, Havana, and the American northeast began to move to Tampa in earnest. Within a decade, Ybor City was outpacing Key West and served as the largest Clear Havana hub in the United States.

Created in part to repel labor organizing, the Clear Havana's industry most radical workers gravitated towards Ybor City. The hope of many manufacturers was that by diversifying the work force and adding non-Cuban workers, labor organizing could be sharply curbed as workers vied for the best positions and divided along ethnic lines. Instead, a confluence of radicalized Cubans, Spaniards, and Italians filled Ybor City's cigar factories. Ethnic conflict certainly occurred on occasion—Cubans and Spaniards had a complicated relationship due the independence wars and Italians occupied the lowest occupational rungs when they first arrived. However, workers for the most part looked to one another as collaborators. Ybor City's cigarmakers were all coming from regions of the world that were undergoing radical transformation among the working class. In Spain, urban workers produced the largest anarchist movement in Europe during the nineteenth century. Many of these workers adopted these ideas and brought them to Havana's cigar factories. There, Cuban cigarmakers were also radicalized

and produced some of the earliest labor organizations that actively confronted manufacturers in Havana. Many of Ybor's Italians, similarly, were radicalized in Sicily and adopted a distinct working-class identity in cities like New Orleans and Tampa. The three groups were branded as the "Latin" community of Ybor City and relied on one another throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Like Key West, Ybor City was also driven by the Cuban independence movement. Although founded during a lull in revolutionary organizing, Ybor City became another outpost for labor activity in the 1890s when the émigré network once again proved invaluable for organizing the Cuban insurgency. As a major unit of the *Partido Revolucionario Cubano*, Ybor City's cigarmakers also played an active part in funding and fighting the Cuban War of Independence. They also hosted nearly every Cuban luminary and drew frequent visits from José Martí. During this period, Martí's were especially important for uniting Cubans in Southern Florida. Many workers during this period felt that the independence movement was a diversion from the needs of workers and wondered aloud whether Cuban independence would bring meaningful change to Cuba's working class. Black Cubans, similarly, wondered whether their participation in the future Cuban republic would be symbolic or substantive. In repeated visits to Southern Florida, Martí skillfully assuaged the fears of workers and assured them that his vision of a Cuban republic would consist of a broad coalition. His efforts calmed tensions in Southern Florida and left Cubans to focus on the insurgency from 1895-1898.

Following Cuba's independence in 1898, workers became singularly focused on labor organizing. Almost immediately, workers began to organize *La Resistencia*, a labor organization that focused primarily on cigarmakers but sought to organize all workers, regardless of profession. At its height, La Resistencia possessed 5,000 members, making it the largest

voluntary organization in the state of Florida. After winning several battles with local manufacturers, La Resistencia looked to expand and considered the possibility of organizing regionally, bringing together workers in Key West and Havana. However, their efforts were fiercely resisted by both manufacturers and leaders of the American labor movement. Manufacturers began to organize collectively as a way of combatting the advances made by La Resistencia. Critical to this development was the alliance between manufacturers, local politicians, and the police. Working together, they were able to create groups that used vigilante tactics against unionized workers. Under the moniker of "Citizens Committees," local politicians and business interests deputized ordinary citizens and allowed them to violently quell labor activity in Ybor City. Following a wave of violence and forced deportations, La Resistencia crumbled by 1902.

The other force that was opposed to La Resistencia was the Cigarmakers' International Union, an affiliate of the American Federation of Labor. As the largest cigar union in the United States, the CMIU had for years attempted to organize in both Key West and Ybor City. They were shunned repeatedly by Cuban cigarmakers who argued that the AFL's more measured tactics were incompatible with the radical brand of organizing adopted by Caribbean cigarmakers. When La Resistencia began to clash with city officials, the CMIU viewed this as their opportunity to make inroads in Florida. They began to pose as the more conservative alternative to the firebrand tactics of La Resistencia and attempted to siphon off workers by arguing that they could more effectively bargain for better wages and working conditions in cigar factories. The tactics ultimately worked as La Resistencia was dissolved and the CMIU became the dominant labor organization for the Clear Havana industry in Key West and Ybor City.

Ultimately, the CMIU did not have an easier time organizing. To begin with, Cuban cigarmakers grew restless and made various attempts at organizing a separate union. However, as the 1905 example in Key West showed, any attempt to reorganize a radical labor union was immediately met with the same vigilante tactics that La Resistencia experienced. As a result, workers continued to work within the CMIU but to limited effect. By 1910, the CMIU tried to wage a general strike for better working conditions in Ybor City. Once again, workers met a united front in the manufacturers who organized with local officials to ensure the union's defeat. Evictions, strikebreaking, and the constant threat of violence proved to be too much for the CMIU. The strike also presented one of the most violent episodes in Tampa's history when two Italians were lynched following the shooting of a local cigar factory bookkeeper. The CMIU continued to be the dominant force in labor organizing in the years that followed but the union was organizing defensively thereafter. With a growing labor pool and workers only loosely organized, mounting a successful campaign against the manufacturers became nearly impossible.

Denouement: On the Machine and the Cigarette

The rise of automated technology and the cigarette were the death knell of the Clear Havana industry. The introduction of machinery in the cigar factory had devastating consequences on the number of employees needed to supply the cigar market. This took place amid a general decline in the popularity of cigars and manufacturers embraced the technology as a godsend. *Tobacco Leaf*, the leading industry journal in the tobacco trade, penned a four part series in 1926 titled "What's Going to Happen in Tampa?" The series looked at the many ills plaguing the industry and looked to possible solutions as a remedy. The third installment was devoted to analyzing the introduction of machinery in cigar factories. The author captured just how fundamental a shift the machine presented to the factory:

“The machine (or chain of machines, which it is in fact) does everything that is claimed for it. With four girl operators and a supervising mechanic it is capable of producing a perfectly made cigar of a character that gives entire satisfaction to the smoker, and at the rate of approximately 450 cigars per hour, not allowing for interruptions; which is equivalent to over 112 cigars per hour per operator. Comparing this output to the more common team-work method, where the production is at the rate of about sixty-five cigars per man per hour, or to the strictly hand method, which approximates not over thirty-five per man per hour, and you have the first of the two dramatic appeals that the machine makes to the imagination. The second important advantage is, of course, the minimizing of the strike menace and its consequent and constant threat of the interruption of production.”³

The second point made by the writer is critical to understanding how fundamental a shift cigarmaking machines posed. The old team method of cigarmaking was conducive to socializing and organizing. Institutions like the *lector*, which were crucial to the education of cigarmakers, stressed the importance of creating a pleasing work environment that was collaborative by nature. Cigarmaking machines decimated work forces and moved cigarmaking away from highly skilled, well-paid work and towards low-wage, unskilled work. As the writer of the *Tobacco Leaf* piece noted, not every manufacturer could afford the machines in the 1920s. But the machine, coupled with earlier efforts stamp out labor organizing, emphasized to workers that their bargaining power was minimal.

For workers, the machine presented a radical shift in their view of cigar work and the stability of the industry. Naturally, many workers were resentful of the machines and the cheap

³ *Tobacco Leaf*, February 27, 1926.

labor it required. As one employee noted, “The machineries for making cigars are at the root of all this evil. Over 600 women, who were employed as cigar banders, have been thrown out, due to the cigar banding machine. Countless numbers of cigar-maker are today unemployed due to cigar-making machines.”⁴ The results were stunning. Factories that once housed 1,500 workers could now operate with a tenth of the work force.⁵ Workers that anticipated the transition benefitted but the introduction of machinery mostly meant unemployment for a sizeable portion of the cigar industry. Dolores Rio, a cigar worker since she was a teenager in Ybor City, was one of the few to see the transition coming. She recalled when a machine was first purchased in her factory. She was approached by a friend and was told “Don’t tell anybody, but go when you are finished working, go and learn the machine. They are going to fire lots of people.” By the time the layoffs began, Rio became one of the lucky ones to remain in the factory and apply her new skills. For workers who had spent decades making cigars by hand, the machine seemed entirely foreign. As she recalled working in the automated system, “It was scary. That machine ran.”⁶

Workers and manufacturers were also blindsided by the popularity of the cigarette. The cigar was largely viewed as an item of leisure, largely consumed by men, meticulously constructed, and priced accordingly. The cigarette presented a more democratic alternative to the cigar. Cheaply made and cheaply sold, the cigarette was marketed to a broader audience and maintained low operating costs for manufacturers. As one Ybor City manufacturer recognized at the time, “The cigarettes are also doing a great deal of harm to the cigar industry. Their production has jumped by leaps and bounds since the war. They are harmful because they have

⁴ Fermin Souto, Folklore Project, Life Histories, Works Progress Administration, 1935, 11.

⁵ John Cacciatore, Folklore Project, Life Histories, Works Progress Administration, 1935, 5.

⁶ *Tampa Tribune*, February 18, 1987.

too much nicotine and opium, yet you see little kids about the streets smoking cigarettes.”⁷ Over time, this greatly weakened the cigar industry nationally and among Southern Florida’s manufacturers and workers in particular.⁸ In time, the cigar became a luxury item for an older generation. As one cigarmaker lamented, “ain’t nobody smoking cigars like they used to; young people all smoking cigarettes. Cigars is going out of style.”⁹

With profit margins becoming narrower, manufacturers began to turn on one another and cigarmakers turned to other industries or simply moved north. Enrique Pendas, a manufacturer and one-time head of the Manufacturers’ Association conceded that “The Union of Manufacturers here is composed of pirates of the industry. They are not human; they can only think of new ways of squeezing the cigarmakers more and more. All the rules and regulations are antiquated.”¹⁰ The continued attempt to lower worker’s wages left cigarmakers in a perilous position where they were forced to accept wages that made living in Key West and Ybor City impossible. Indeed, the final installment of the *Tobacco Leaf*’s series on the Clear Havana industry in Florida talked of the need to develop more affordable housing options because worker’s wages had become so paltry.¹¹ Under these conditions, many workers simply relocated, often to New York, in an attempt to find a more stable living.

Key West: Towards Tourism

⁷ Enrique Pendas interview by F. Valdes, 8.

⁸ Ibid, 8-9.

⁹ Enrique and Amanda, interview by Stetson Kennedy and Adolpha Pellate, Folklore Project, Life Histories, Works Progress Administration, January 3, 1939, 11.

¹⁰ Enrique Pendas interview by F. Valdes, 7.

¹¹ *Tobacco Leaf*, March 6, 1926.

As early as the 1910s, Key West was beginning to redefine itself as a tourist destination. The critical first step was establishing a reliable connection between Key West and the American mainland. Henry Flagler, one of the original architects of Standard Oil, spent his last years building the Florida East Coast Railway. The final piece of the project would connect the Florida Keys by rail and establish Key West as a major tourist destination.¹² Along the way, he helped to build much of modern South Florida—cities like West Palm Beach and Miami became stops along the way and the luxury hotels and ancillary tourist industries soon followed. The Key West extension proved to be the most difficult and ambitious part of the project. Construction required several thousand employees and a wave of logistical difficulties marred the railway's construction. The highlight of the extension was the Seven Mile Bridge, connecting Knight's Key to Little Duck Key. At the time of its construction, it stood as the longest free-standing bridge in the world and became the postcard image of the railway extension. After an arduous construction process, the railway was completed in 1912 and hailed as the beginning of a new era in Florida Keys history. The railway extension was only modestly successful but it spurred the initial development of tourist attractions in the Florida Keys and began to establish Key West as an ideal vacation destination for wealthy residents of the American northeast.

By the 1920s, there were various efforts underway to transform Key West's infrastructure and identity. This was most obvious in the development of Duval Street, the city's main artery. The Instituto San Carlos is situated in the heart of Duval and was once one of many Cuban institutions in the area. The future, however, was being built around it in the 1920s. A mere few

¹² For more on the construction of the Florida East Coast Railway and the Key West extension, see Les Standiford and Henry Morrison Flagler, *Last Train to Paradise: Henry Flagler and the Spectacular Rise and Fall of the Railroad That Crossed the Ocean* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2002).

hundred feet away, one of the symbols of contemporary Key West was being constructed: La Concha Hotel. Billed as a luxury hotel that would continue to attract tourists, the hotel was one of several business that used the island's Caribbean aura as a way of selling an exotic destination to American tourist. The six story structure stood out in a city that had long been defined by the modesty of its architecture and physical structures. An article discussing its opening mentioned that the hotel was part of a broader initiative to establish Key West as "one of the coming points of tourist's interest, with an inevitable increase of travel in the future which will make the city one of the bright spots on the resort map of the United States."¹³ Ever since this period in the 1920s, Key West has ebbed and flowed on the strength of its tourism sector.

The Cuban population of Key West declined over the next several decades but the Cuban Revolution of 1959 led to a new era of interaction between Key West and Cuba. Just as it had in the late nineteenth century, Key West in the latter half of the twentieth century symbolized salvation for many Cubans. Following the success of Fidel Castro's Cuban Revolution, Cuban migration to the United States has followed in waves. Two waves, the Mariel Boatlift of 1980 and the Balsero Crisis of 1993-1995, had a distinct effect on Key West as thousands of Cubans fled the island by sea with the intent of reaching American soil. Given Key West's location, it became an obvious destination for thousands of Cubans. Cubans rarely stayed in Key West; the tiny island was incapable of housing a substantive number of the exiles. However, the city has been ensnared by many of the more contentious moments in United States-Cuba relations.

For several months in 1980, the Mariel Boatlift spurred some of the most frenzied activity in Key West's history. On April 1, 1980, a group of Cubans commandeered a bus and drove it through the gates of the Peruvian embassy in Havana. The Cuban guards stationed

¹³ *Key West Citizen*, October 10, 1921.

outside the embassy were unable to prevent their entrance and the Cubans made their way to the embassy to request political asylum from the Peruvian ambassador. When their asylum request was granted, word spread, and within days the Peruvian embassy was inundated with thousands of Cubans. With the embassy packed to the brim, the event marked one of the few public displays of criticism against Castro's government. Flustered, Castro declared that anyone who wanted to leave the country would be allowed to leave through the Port of Mariel. The order was temporary, as Castro closed the port later that year, but over the next several months, 125,000 Cubans fled the island. News of the opening caused a flurry of activity on the part of Cubans that escaped during earlier waves. Within days, Cuban Americans commissioned boats in Miami and Key West with the intent of traveling to Mariel and bringing the Cubans back to Southern Florida. Images from this period illustrate just how overwhelmed Key West was during this influx. On the busiest day of the exodus, May 11, 4,588 Cubans arrived at the Key West marina. The city's entire population during this time was just shy of 25,000. Handling the newly arrived Cubans essentially became a military operation manned by the United States Coast Guard and Customs. Both agencies were instrumental in processing, housing, and saving vessels stranded along the Florida Straits. Sections of Key West's Naval Station became repurposed as processing centers and temporary housing quarters. Other exiles were flown as far north as Florida's panhandle to be housed and processed. Although the flood of immigrants was temporary, the event served as reminder of the close connection between Cubans and Key West.

The Balsero Crisis was prompted by similar, albeit more tragic, circumstances. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cuba entered into its Special Period—an era of prolonged economic depression in the country. Without Soviet subsidies, particularly for oil, Cuba's transportation and agricultural sectors were ravaged. This led to widespread food, water, and

electricity shortages in the country. It was during this period that the average Cuban lost 5-25% of their body weight.¹⁴ With desperation bubbling, many Cubans resorted to creating makeshift rafts and escaping to the United States. Once again, Key West became salvation for thousands of fleeing Cubans. One estimate noted that 35,000 to 40,000 Cubans left for the United States during this period.¹⁵ Many successfully reached Key West, thousands of others, particularly those that left from Southern Cuba, drifted towards the Cayman Islands, and an unconfirmed number ultimately perished en route to Florida. Others were saved by the United States Coast Guard at sea and temporarily held at Guantanamo until the refugees could be processed. The opening of Guantanamo assuaged some of the pressure from Key West—the mob scene that the city became during the Mariel Boatlift was avoided but the arrival of refugees became an expected part of living in Key West. One of the outcomes of the Balsero Crisis was President Bill Clinton’s altering of the Cuban Adjustment Act. Known as the Wet Foot, Dry Foot policy, the act established that Cubans caught at sea by the United States Coast Guard would be returned to Cuba but that any Cuban that makes landfall in the United States is granted a path to citizenship.

In the present day, Key West maintains inklings of its Cuban identity but it is far from dominant. Key West’s population has maintained relatively stable—about 18,000 people called Key West home in 1920. That number now sits just below 25,000. Long gone are the days when a multiracial population of Cubans and Bahamians dominated the island. The island is currently 18.2% Latino and 9.9% Black.¹⁶ Both cities have become whiter, wealthier, and less working

¹⁴ "Health Consequences of Cuba's Special Period," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 179, no. 3 (2008): 257.

¹⁵ Julia Sweig, *Cuba: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 143.

¹⁶ "Key West and Monroe County Demographics and Economy," Key West Chamber of Commerce, 2014,

<http://www.keywestchamber.org/uploads/4/6/5/2/46520599/demographics.pdf>.

class. With that said, connections to Cuba continue and there is a renewed sense that we are approaching a return to the days when Key West provided daily ferry and flight service to Havana. In 2013, when travel restrictions to Cuba were eased by President Barack Obama, charter companies in Key West received permission to fly to Cuba for the first time in 51 years. With the 2014 normalization of diplomatic relations, new interactions between Cuba and Key West seem likely.

Tampa: A Tale of Urban Renewal and Sprawl

Unlike Key West, Ybor City did not have a seamless transition into becoming a tourist center. Hit by both losses in the cigar industry and the Great Depression, Ybor City struggled mightily in the late 1920s and 1930s. With cigar factories closing or laying off workers, cigarmakers often worked in other industries or moved out of Ybor City. Over the next several decades, Ybor City grew poorer and less Cuban. Particularly in the post-World War II period, many white Cubans simply left the neighborhood and moved into Tampa's suburbs. At this same time, African Americans began to move into Ybor City in greater numbers and lived alongside the black Cuban population.¹⁷ While the neighborhood lost much of its working-class base, black Cubans and African Americans became particularly close during this period. La Union Martí-Maceo's dance hall was especially important for uniting the young residents of Ybor City. Prominent African American musicians made regular stops at the dance hall—acts like Cab Calloway, B.B. King, and Fats Domino played to the diverse black crowd of Ybor City.¹⁸ Pointing to the popularity of the club and the pervasiveness of Jim Crow segregation, one Martí-

¹⁷ Susan Greenbaum, "Afro-Cubans in Exile: Tampa, Florida, 1886-1984," *Cuban Studies* 15, no. 1 (Winter 1985): 67.

¹⁸ *St. Petersburg Times*, February 25, 1990.

Maceo remembered that “We had all the top bands. White people would stand outside to listen as well.”¹⁹

However, by the 1960s, Ybor City fell victim to urban renewal. As a poor neighborhood suffering from “industrial obsolescence and declining housing stock,” Ybor City was identified as a neighborhood that would benefit from a massive rebuilding effort.²⁰ Designed as part of a federal program intent on redeveloping dense urban areas, much of Ybor City was demolished during the 1960s as part of this initiative. There was a distinct racial component in the neighborhood’s destruction. Major factory buildings and ethnic societies were preserved but most of the residential areas were bulldozed during renewal. Displaced, the Cubans and African Americans of Ybor City often lost their homes and the history of their neighborhood. To make matters worse, much of the demolished areas of Ybor City remained barren for decades, adding to the blight that plagued the neighborhood.

Urban renewal was especially painful for members of La Union Martí-Maceo. Martí-Maceo became the only major ethnic society to have its building demolished during the renewal process. The decision was highly contentious and left a bitterness in Tampa’s black Cuban community that persists to this day. Decades later, Sylvia Griñan recalled that “Ours was the only Latin club they tore down...And they say this town isn’t prejudiced.”²¹ The remaining members of Martí-Maceo regrouped and moved to a new location but because the building is not in a federally recognized building of historical significance, the society is not given the same protections that are offered to Ybor City’s other ethnic societies.

¹⁹ *Tampa Tribune*, June 15, 2006.

²⁰ Greenbaum, 68.

²¹ *St. Petersburg Times*, February 25, 1990.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, Ybor City continued to have a relationship with Cuba but it was not as active as Key West's. In the pre-Castro era, Ybor City had a working relationship with the government of Fulgencio Batista. With little money to support Cuban institutions, residents of Ybor City often approached the Cuban government to fund cultural initiatives in Florida. As late as 1956, Ybor City's Cubans were still working with the Batista government to build the Parque Amigos de José Martí. The Cuban government pledged \$18,232 towards the construction of the park in addition to building many of the marble structures in the park and assigning a full-time gardener to the project.²² Following the Cuban Revolution, Ybor City was not one of the major hubs of new immigration. A major reason for this was proximity. Following the Cuban Revolution, Key West became a magnet for Cuban migrants because of it served as the southernmost point of Florida and was an ideal location for Cuban refugees to land. Situated in West Florida, Ybor City was not a typical destination for newly arrived Cubans—the vast majority of Cubans that stayed in Florida took residence in Miami. In many ways, Ybor City's Cubans felt disconnected from the Castro-era wave of migrants. In 1972, the Miami Herald profiled Ybor City and tracked one particular family to get a sense of Ybor City's connection to Cuban history. Speaking with one of the long-term residents of Ybor City, the report noted that “She has sympathy for the Cubans who recently came into exile, but she can't really identify with them.” The woman, Delia Diaz, went on to say that “All Cubans do care in their hearts. But there are few ties between Tampa and Miami Cubans. Not many Tampa Cubans

²² “Cuba to Raze Marti House to Build Garden Sanctuary,” October 21, 1956, Special Collections, University of South Florida. Tony Pizzo Collection, Box 57, Folder Marti-Maceo.

had relatives in Cuba when Castro came in. Tampa Cubans went through exile three generations ago, and so we naturally feel American, although we're still Cuban too."²³

Over the last few decades, Ybor City has undergone a period of gradual development and gentrification. In many ways, the beginning of this trend can be tracked to 1974 when Ybor City was classified as a National Historic District. Over the next several years, city planners began to plot ways of using the neighborhood's Latin history as a way to create a modern shopping and entertainment district.²⁴ Since then, the neighborhood has been stuck in a type of "identity-crisis mode."²⁵ For the past several decades, Ybor City has balanced its many identities: a historic home for the city's Latin population, a well-known party zone, an area that increasingly draws in young urban professionals, and an area that boasts one of the stronger LGBT communities in the United States (a coalition known as GaYbor). During the early 1980s, it was artists who were first drawn to the neighborhood for its cheap rent and rich architecture. Development has occurred in fits and starts since then but the neighborhood, particularly along 7th avenue, has become an increasingly dense region that is geared towards young urban professionals. A recent report on the neighborhood's development situated Ybor's recent history as going "from dead zone to weekend party strip to well-rounded urban center with its own base of residents and employers."²⁶ With each iteration, Ybor City and its Cuban history, has been repurposed for a

²³ *Miami Herald*, July 24, 1972.

²⁴ For more on recent gentrification in Ybor City, see Alexandra Fitos, *Where the Palm Grows: The Ybor City Revitalization Project* (MA thesis, University of South Florida, 2004).

²⁵ *Tampa Tribune*, October 17, 2007, <http://tbo.com/south-tampa/re-branding-not-necessary-to-improve-ybor-city-219906>.

²⁶ *Tampa Bay Times*, November 1, 2014, <http://www.tampabay.com/news/business/realestate/proposed-boutique-hotel-is-latest-sign-of-ybor-citys-evolution/2204721>.

new generation of Tampa residents. These changes have been reflective of Tampa's massive growth in the last century. In the 1920s, Tampa's population hovered over 50,000 residents—the city now holds over 350,000 residents, with over 4 million belonging to the broader Tampa Bay metropolitan area.

Reclaiming the Past: On Cuban History, Race, and Immigration

Over the past several decades, Key West and Ybor City have created commemorative spaces and undertaken large restoration efforts to preserve the Cuban and Cuban-American history of both cities. Houses, museums, parks, cigar factories, and cultural societies allow residents and visitors to recall the days when the Clear Havana industry shaped Southern Florida. While these efforts have been critically important, they have also been selective. The history of the Clear Havana industry is a history of Cuban independence, labor radicalism, interracial cooperation, and Jim Crow segregation. The history of labor organizing and race is largely buried in the public memorials of Cuban Southern Florida. The Cuban independence movement is the one theme that is accurately addressed—this discrepancy helps explain a great deal about which parts of the Clear Havana industry are worth remembering for contemporary Floridians. For a new generation of Cuban immigrants that fled after 1959, the tale of nineteenth century exiles battling against a tyrannical government in Cuba translates easily. Battles over the place of anarchism and race relations are a harder sell in Southern Florida's tourist-friendly atmosphere. However, in recent years, many activists and residents have been working to add public spaces that provide a more comprehensive view of Southern Florida's Cuban history. A general overview of these public spaces speaks to the contested history of Southern Florida and Cuban Americans.

As the oldest Cuban institution in Southern Florida and as a site of critical importance for the Cuban independence movement, the Instituto San Carlos is Key West's most prized piece of Cuban history. The San Carlos has meant many different things throughout Key West's history: it was a gathering point for nineteenth century freedom fighters, an institution that preserved Cuban culture in the early twentieth century, an abandoned building in the middle of the twentieth century, and is now a non-profit organization and museum. Dating back to the San Carlos' original building which was constructed in 1871, the San Carlos served a variety of functions for the original Cuban population of Key West. Its recent history is intrinsically connected to the Cuban Revolution. Following Cuban independence, the Institute had a long history of collaborating with the Cuban government on the upkeep and funding of the building. For much of the first half of the twentieth century, the Cuban consulate's offices were even located in the San Carlos. However, after the Cuban Revolution, communication with the Cuban government ceased and funding for the institute dried up. Coupled with a declining Cuban population, the building fell into disrepair. By 1973, the institute and school were forced shut. For the next 19 years, the building remained vacant, a refuge for local vagrants. The low point came in 1981 when a piece of the building broke off and fell on a tourist. Key West residents began to argue that the building should either be demolished or repurposed as a commercial center. Beginning in the mid-1980s, a group led by Miami attorney Rafael Peñalver lobbied Florida congressmen and prominent Cuban Americans to preserve the building. Through a joint effort that brought together state funds and private donations, a multi-million dollar restoration of the building was made. The building was fully restored and original pieces, including a bust of José Martí, were customized for the building's re-opening. In 1992, the San Carlos reopened as a non-profit organization that served as a museum and memorial of the Cuban history of Southern

Florida. The building's revival came with the support of many Cuban Americans that migrated to the United States in the wake of the Cuban Revolution. Unsurprisingly, the museum reflects on a broad history of Cuban Americans. Exhibits at the San Carlos combine nineteenth century stories of the institute alongside more contemporary exhibits such as one on the balsero crisis. The hall is also rented out for private events and hosts public talks, graduations, musical performances, and a host of other events.

Aside from the San Carlos, memories of Cuban Key West are scant. Allusions to Cuba and Key West's history are generally used as a way to sell the city. The handful of cigar shops on the island allude to Cuban cigars and the allure of Key West's Cuban history but there is little in the way of commemorations to the workers that made Key West an enterprising city. One small children's area near Mallory Square has a cartoon rendering of early Key West, depicting cigarmakers on the island, both black and white intermingling. The art work harkens back to the days when Spanish was the dominant language on the island and Cuban workers were the symbol of the city. It is one of the only nuanced portrayals of Cuban Key West and it comes flippantly in cartoon form.

Efforts to chronicle Key West's murky racial history have been even harder to come by. One of the more successful attempts has involved the restoration of Monroe County Judge James Dean's reputation. Chapter 4 chronicled the life of Dean, one of the first black men to serve as a judge after Reconstruction. In two separate instances, he was asked to adjudicate cases with local Cubans that tested the limits of Florida's Jim Crow laws. In the first case, Dean provided a marriage license to a mixed-race Cuban that passed as white and a mixed-race woman that was viewed as black. Soon after he granted the license, local Key West citizens protested that he violated Florida's constitution by marrying a white man and a black woman. In a similar case,

Dean presided over a cohabitation case where a white Cuban was accused of living with a black woman. When Dean informed the man that he would need to declare himself as a “Negro” to marry the woman, the man fled Key West. Both cases were investigated and Florida’s governor removed Dean from his post. Dean’s firing was part of a broader effort in Florida to remove African Americans from positions of power. Dean later died, poor and undistinguished, in Jacksonville in 1914.

Over a century later, Calvin Allen, a Key West attorney, began the arduous process of restoring Dean’s name and dignity. Allen, like Dean, was an alumnus of Howard University’s Law School. Allen learned about Dean’s life in passing and grew outraged over Dean’s forced removal. For Allen, Dean’s story was an invaluable reminder of Jim Crow Florida and a rich part of the history of African Americans in Key West. Allen began a quest to posthumously restore Dean as a Monroe County judge. His argument was simple: At the time, only the Florida state senate had the authority to remove Dean from his position. Governor Francis Fleming, in removing Dean unilaterally, violated Florida’s state constitution. Moreover, given the historical context, it is likely that Dean’s removal was racially motivated. The process took years but in 2002, Allen’s efforts paid off and then-governor Jeb Bush reinstated Dean’s judgeship.²⁷ As Allen commented afterwards during the process, “The governor is going to restore his name, and I would like more people to know about the contributions he made and the unfair treatment he was subjected to.”²⁸ A portrait of Judge Dean now hangs in the Judge’s Gallery in Key West’s Whitehead Street courthouse.

²⁷ *Key West Citizen*, May 2, 2002.

²⁸ *Arizona Republic*, February 24, 2002.

More recent efforts have also been made to shed light on the history of violence and vigilantism in Key West. As the city that adopted the “One Human Family” slogan as their official motto in 2000, this more violent history is a sharp contrast to the tourist-friendly city that Key West now sells itself as. In particular, the Ku Klux Klan’s history on the island has gained recent attention due to the discovery of the city’s original Klan charter. The charter was donated in 2012 to the Monroe County Public Library and led many local residents to inquire about the city’s local history and its affiliation with an organization that is rarely associated with Southern Florida. The charter, donated anonymously by a former resident, points to the connection between the Klan and many of the city’s most prominent citizens. Signed in 1921, the document is reflective of the surge in nationwide Klan efforts in the 1920s. The Klan became a powerful organization in both Key West and Ybor City and were central to propagating the separation of racial groups and enforcing segregation through intimidation and violence.

The Klan’s power in Key West was most evident in the case of Manuel Cabeza. Cabeza, a Canary Islander in a relationship with a mixed race Cuban woman, was the victim of the Klan’s violence. After being tarred and feathered by a group of Klan members in 1921, Cabeza shot and killed one of the assailants days later. The murder led to Cabeza’s eventual capture and imprisonment. When local officers attempted to transport him to another jail, he was forcibly taken by a mob of KKK members and lynched. The event captured one of the most violent episodes in Key West’s history and has only been sporadically mentioned in local news reports. However, a more recent effort to draw attention to the case has been led by a high school educator in Miami. Michael Littman, a teacher in Miami-Dade County Public Schools, leads an initiative called the Historical Memory for Truth Project, which asks students to engage in historical inquiry. Littman has been leading students to analyze the case in an attempt to identify

perpetrators and restore Cabeza's legacy. Details on the case have been notoriously sparse and biased, but Littman has continued his efforts. He is currently working with his students to give Cabeza, a World War I veteran, a full military burial with the requisite grave marker. These recent efforts mark some of the only work that has been done in an attempt to talk about the legacy of race in Key West and how black and white Cubans navigated the Jim Crow era in Florida. As local archivist Tom Hambricht noted about the case, "Our history is not always rosy."²⁹

Ybor City's attempt to preserve its Cuban history has been far more ambitious in scope. In addition to the classification of the historic district, the neighborhood has statues, a park, several cultural centers, and a museum to celebrate the immigrant history of Ybor City. However, it is similar to Key West in that it avoids some of the more controversial aspects of the neighborhood's history. Ybor City has also relied on the portrait of a hardworking, white immigrant population that serves as a historical quick amid a tourist area. Just as with Key West, it has fallen to local residents and activists to draw attention to aspects of Ybor City's history that are often overlooked.

One of the easiest ways to examine the preservation of Ybor City's Latin history is to look at the life-sized statues that dot the neighborhood. José Martí's statue in Ybor City's Parque Amigos is no surprise. As one of the most notable figures in Latin American history, the influential Martí is revered by Cubans in Southern Florida. Nearby in Centro Ybor is a bronze statue of the neighborhood's founder, Vicente Ybor. Although born in Spain, Ybor became one of the most ardent supporters of Cuban independence and was instrumental in the development of both Key West and Tampa. Roland Manteiga also received the bronze treatment in 2003.

²⁹ *Key West Citizen*, March 25, 2012, http://keysnews.com/node/38753?hc_location=ufi.

Manteiga served as the editor of *La Gaceta* for over four decades. The tri-lingual newspaper is still in print and has played an important role in the preservation of Ybor City's Latin history. Ybor's City's Italians are also represented in the neighborhood's public monuments. Nick Nuccio, the first member of Ybor City's Latin community to be elected mayor of Tampa, is now memorialized by a statue that sits on 8th Avenue's Centennial Park. Nuccio was well liked by many Latin natives of Tampa. As one report recalled, "Nuccio spoke their language, whether Spanish or Italian, and like them was least comfortable when speaking English."³⁰ As mayor of Tampa in the 1950s and 1960s, Nuccio was in office during much of Ybor City's urban renewal efforts. In general, the statues are a celebration of Ybor City's professional class: a prominent Cuban poet and journalist, a Spanish manufacturer, a newspaper editor, and a former mayor. The working-class cigarmakers that built the neighborhood are notably absent in these public memorials.

The contemporary view of Ybor City's Cuban history is best seen in its immigrant statue. In the buildup to the statue's construction, there was considerable debate about what type of statue could best convey the town's working-class history. Gerald Jardon, son of an Ybor City grocer and brother to two cigarmaking brothers, argued in a letter that the statue needed to be centered on cigarmakers as a way of showing how the success of Ybor City's Latin community is directly attributable to the early pioneers of the neighborhood. As he noted, "Their greatest contribution lives today in their descendants—the present day doctors, lawyers, bankers, educators, and businessmen, who are pillars of the community and owe their status to their immigrant forefathers who worked diligently on farms and in shops. Those immigrants, in turn,

³⁰ *St. Petersburg Times*, October 23, 1999,

http://www.sptimes.com/News/102399/Hillsborough/Tampa_honors_Nuccio.shtml.

owe their success to their business acumen and the cigar industry which created the market that attracted them here to sell their goods.” Jardon believed strongly that the statue should be that of a *tabaquero*. He conceded that no one statue could capture the complexity of the immigrant experience of Ybor City but that the *tabaquero* was its most representative figure. Included in his letter to the editor was a rendering of what the statue might look like: The image is of a mustachioed cigar worker with his shirt crumpled, two cigars poking out his shirt pocket, a jacket draped over his shoulder, and a straw hat loosely hanging on his head.

Unveiled in 1992, Ybor City’s immigrant statue is markedly different from Jardon’s proposal. The statue shows a family of four: the father, in a full suit and trilby hat, stares into the distance, his wife stands next to him with an expression of caution, and they are flanked on either side by their two children. It reads: “To those courageous men and women who came to this country in search of personal freedom, economic opportunity and a future of hope for their families.” The family portrayed in the statue could have just as easily been a European family arriving at Ellis Island. The statue's caption, focusing on economic opportunity and personal freedom, belies the more complicated narrative of the immigrant experience in Southern Florida. Robbed of what made Ybor City’s community so unique, the immigrants become a blank slate to be molded by the American experience.

In recent years, La Union-Marti Maceo has fought to create greater awareness about the history of Ybor City’s black Cubans. A key reason for the group’s renaissance has been an increasing number of elderly black Cubans who have moved back to Ybor City after retirement.³¹ With an uptick in membership, the society has become more involved in community affairs and has promoted a number of initiatives to draw awareness to the group’s

³¹ *St. Petersburg Times*, February 25, 1990.

history. One of their initiatives involved adding a bust of Antonio Maceo to Ybor City's Parque Amigos de José Martí. The park sits on a plot of land that was originally owned by Paulina and Ruperto Pedroso, a prominent black Cuban couple. Their house was where Martí stayed during his many trips to Ybor City in the nineteenth century. At the park, the Pedroso's are a mere footnote in what is ultimately a memorial about Martí. In the 1990s, the Marti-Maceo society led an effort to include a monument of Antonio Maceo, the mixed race freedom fighter from the Cuban War of Independence. Led by Maceo's great-niece, the bust was approved and displayed in 1996 to commemorate the centennial of his passing.³² It presently stands as one of the few public acknowledgements of black Cubans in Tampa.

La Union Marti-Maceo has been memorialized in other ways working with city government and local academics. In 1989, Florida recognized the organization as a historical society. Adding to these efforts, Mayor Pam Iorio signed an official Marti-Maceo Day to honor the group's contributions to Tampa in 2007. The group has also worked closely with the University of South Florida in an effort to preserve La Union's history. In addition to donating their archive to USF's Special Collections, Susan Greenbaum, an anthropologist at USF, has worked tirelessly to document the stories of Marti-Maceo members through oral histories a monograph about the society's long history.³³ In many ways, Marti-Maceo's struggles for local recognition are an ongoing battle. As one member noted, "We're invisible."³⁴ At a recent Ybor City event, speakers praised the ethnic societies of the city without ever mentioning Marti-Maceo. Aaron Smith, a Marti-Maceo member who was in attendance, noted that "We've been

³² *Tampa Morning Tribune*, June 9, 1996.

³³ Susan D. Greenbaum, *More than Black: Afro-Cubans in Tampa*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2002).

³⁴ *St. Petersburg Times*, February 25, 1990.

very much the stepchild.”³⁵ Gradually, this is changing and the group’s work is starting to bear fruit. Ybor City’s most recent public memorial is among its most ambitious. In 2013, a 12,000 square foot mural was unveiled in Ybor City’s Adamo Drive. The piece stands as the largest mural in Florida and is an attempt at consolidating the past, present, and future of Ybor City. In the middle of the mural is a section dedicated to the “personalities of Ybor City.” Alongside the traditional faces of Vicente Ybor and Gavino Gutierrez are black Cubans like Antonio Maceo and Paulina Pedroso. In thinking about the motivation for the mural, one of the project’s developers noted that “I looked at Ybor City and felt we could do much, much better. It’s great that we have an entertainment district, but everything else had kind of withered away...I asked myself, 'What can we do to get the balance back?’”³⁶

The Cuban Florida of the Future

El Reloj is the final holdout. Along Ybor City’s 16th Street stands the last active cigar factory in all of Tampa’s Latin Quarter. When it was originally constructed in 1910, it housed El Regensburg Cigar Factory and employed over 1,000 workers. Its most distinctive feature was its large clock tower which became the unofficial watch of Ybor City. For decades, the tower’s 5pm bell meant the end of the workday for thousands of Ybor City cigarworkers. Like every other factory in town, the Regensburg felt the sting of mechanization, the rise of the cigarette, and the Great Depression. By 1951, the Regensburg closed its operations. Three years later, the J.C. Newman Cigar Company, based out of Cleveland, moved into the factory and has been there ever since. The Newman’s have been in the cigar business since 1895 and seen their fair share of

³⁵ *Tampa Tribune*, June 15, 2006.

³⁶ *Tampa Bay Times*, April 26, 2012, <http://www.tampabay.com/features/visualarts/mural-on-edge-of-ybor-city-to-spruce-up-gritty-stretch-of-adamo-drive/1226880>.

obstacles. As Eric Newman, one of the two co-owners of the company described, “We have gone through two World Wars, the Great Depression, the Cuban trade embargo, smoking bans, excessive taxation and competition from low-wage countries.”³⁷ In 2014, they faced their toughest challenge. The Food and Drug Administration put plans in motion that would allow them to broaden their regulation of the tobacco industry and force cigarmakers to follow many of the same regulatory standards that have been applied to cigarettes. Cigars that are completely handmade will be exempt from some of the regulations but the Newman factory uses some machinery. The machinery used in the factory is hardly sophisticated by contemporary standards—the newest machines date back to the 1930s. Nevertheless, they do not meet the current standards for exemption. If the regulations are enacted, the cost of compliance would essentially put the Newman factory out of business and put a formal close to the cigar era in Ybor City. The finer points of the regulations are still being sorted out by the FDA and the Newman family has vowed to fight to keep the factory open.

Regardless of whether or not the Newman factory closes, both Key West and Ybor City have been lamenting the loss of the Clear Havana industry for many years. Over the last several decades, journalists and academics have looked to older Cubans to record the stories of Southern Florida’s good old days when Cubans were the dominant group in Key West and Ybor City and the cigar industry was king. In 1979, the Miami Herald profiled Evelio Cabot, a second-generation cigarmaker that began working in Key West’s cigar factories when he was a teenager in the 1920s. When the cigar industry began to crumble, he became a firefighter, where he would spend the rest of his professional life. A Herald writer approached him in 1979 to recall his experiences and see if he could still roll a perfect cigar. Sitting at a rolling table for the first time

³⁷ *New York Times*, July 22, 2014.

in years, his hands worked effortlessly through the tobacco, molds, and crescent knife scattered on the table. Sitting in this familiar setting, he mused, “I remember sitting at my table and there were 400 men in the factory. You couldn’t use fans because they would dry the tobacco so it was hot. A reader sat on a high stool in the middle of the room. We’d each give him a nickel a day. He’d read newspapers from Spain, from Cuba. He’d read novels.”³⁸

Ultimately, the Newman factory is largely symbolic. Both Key West and Ybor City bear little resemblance to the cigar towns they once were. Their Cuban populations have shrunk, their industrial centers are mostly gone, and the Cuban tobacco that served as the catalyst for the Clear Havana industry has been illegal in the United States for over half a century. The memories of Cuban Key West and Ybor City are preserved by the restored structures in both cities and the few Cubans old enough to remember the final days of the cigar industry’s golden era. In the post-World War II era, Florida has become synonymous with paradise. Incorporating a cigar history that includes industrious immigrants and charming architecture fits well into the contemporary context of the state. The legacy of multiculturalism, Jim Crow, and labor rights are essential aspects of Cuban American history that are easily lost in this new paradigm. It is for this reason that La Union Marti-Maceo exemplifies the battle to preserve many of the most important facets of Southern Florida history. In 1992, Clara Maldonado was elected as President of La Union Marti-Maceo; the first woman to hold the position in the group’s history. She was the daughter of Eusevio Guerra, one of the club’s first members, who constantly reminded her that “This club is the only representation black Cubans have in this city... You must always take care of it.”³⁹ The generation of Cubans embodied by Maldonado, the last generation to remember the Clear

³⁸ *Miami Herald*, June 24, 1979.

³⁹ *Tampa Tribune*, March 3, 1992.

Havana days of Key West and Ybor City, are becoming fewer and fewer. It will soon fall to a generation of Floridians with no direct experience with the era to preserve and present the history of two little towns that have a great deal to say about Cuba, Florida, and the history of Cuban Americans.

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