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CUBAN REVOLUTIONARIES AND MONROE COUNTY RECONSTRUCTION POLITICS, 1868-1876

by GERALD E. POYO*

THE INTRICATE historical relationship between the United States and Cuba has traditionally fostered intimate contacts between segments of their populations. Florida has served as the primary stage upon which the two cultures have confronted and coexisted. Although the post-Castro immigration has dominated the attention of those interested in tracing Cuban contributions to the development of the state, it should be emphasized that the Cuban presence in Florida has been equally important during earlier periods.

The first significant immigration of Cubans into Florida began in 1868 upon the outbreak of the Cuban war against Spanish dominance, and continued for the next thirty years at varying levels of intensity. Cubans initially established themselves primarily in Key West, and later in other areas— in and around Jacksonville and in the Tampa Bay area— producing intimate political, economic, and social contacts with Floridians. In Monroe County, Cubans exerted decisive influences in political affairs, and economically they were the backbone of the community. Although in Cuban historiography several studies have examined Cubans in Key West, these have usually stressed their activities in relation to the history of their homeland. The cross-cultural aspects of the Cuban presence have received limited attention. A paucity of research relating to Cuban involvement in Florida politics, for example, has delayed recognition of their vigorous and effective participation in local and state political affairs. During the 1870s, Monroe County provided a prime example of the determination and effectiveness with which Cubans participated in the political system of

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their adopted homeland. They operated in two realms: those activities related directly to the independence cause and actions connected with the political system in the United States. The two were not mutually exclusive given that the Cuban insurrection became the focal point for political decision-making in the community.

With the adoption of a new state constitution in 1868 and the election of its government officials, Florida again became a full-fledged member of the Union. There followed almost a decade of intense turbulence as the Democratic party, representative of the traditional economic and social elite of the state, wrested political control from the Republicans. The same year that Florida rejoined the Union, across the Straits of Florida in the Spanish colony of Cuba, events of a dramatic nature unfolded that proved important not only for the inhabitants of the island, but for the political situation in Florida and particularly in Monroe County.

On October 10, 1868, the *Grito de Yara* in Cuba signaled the initiation of what proved to be many years of struggle to achieve political independence. The first phase of the movement, the Ten Years' War, plunged the island into a protracted and bloody civil war that produced an emigrant flow of Cubans to Key West. The establishment of a large Cuban community devoted to securing the independence of its homeland exerted a powerful impact on all aspects of life in Key West.

Economic inducements aided the immigrant flow into Florida. A special allure was the incipient cigar industry founded by Vicente Martinez Ybor, a Spanish tobacco capitalist from Havana.¹ The factories attracted Cuban workers, adding substantially to the emigre population.

By February 1869, a Cuban colony was thriving in Key West. Revolutionary clubs were organized to raise funds and arm men who were sent to join the expeditionary forces being formed in New York. Key West became a major area of support to the revolutionary effort. According to one Cuban resident, "In Key West nothing was discussed except the revolution;

1. Willis Baer, *The Economic Development of the Cigar Industry in the United States* (Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1933), 106-07.

each Cuban home was a conspiratorial center; people only thought about the redemption of the fatherland."²

Immigration radically altered the demography of Monroe County in the years after the Civil War. A population of 5,657 in Key West in 1870 increased to something over 12,000 six years later. The Cuban proportion increased also, from approximately twenty-five to more than fifty per cent.³ This phenomenon could not help but affect the political situation in the community. State law required six months residence for county elections, one year for state elections, and a declaration of intent to become a citizen. Once these requirements were satisfied, the Cuban emigres could vote and a new electoral element began emerging.

The Republican party had gained control of Florida politics by 1868, although Monroe County Democrats still exerted strong influence. One of the factors favoring the Republicans in Monroe County was the presence of the Cubans, and the influx of a significant number of blacks from the Bahamas. While in some parts of Florida the election of 1870 marked the beginnings of the political decline of the Republican party, the curious demographic situation in Key West delayed its demise there for another decade.

The 1868 election results in Monroe County demonstrated that Democratic and Republican strength was fairly evenly divided. The Democrats running for state and congressional seats fared well that year, and also in the municipal contest in 1869. However, county Republican party officials led by Eldridge Ware, H. A. Crane, and James W. Locke organized a coalition that insured their control of both municipal and county offices. Given the political climate in the county after the Civil War, the black vote proved easy prey for Republican organizers. The other element of the envisioned coalition was the Cuban emigre community.

2. Juan Pérez Rolo, *Mis Recuerdos* (n.p., n.d.), 9. For a more detailed discussion of this aspect of Cuban activities, see Juan J. E. Casasus, *La Emigración Cubana y la Independencia de la Patria* (Havana, 1953), 149-54.

3. U. S. Census Office, *Ninth Census of the United States, 1870*, original population schedules on microfilm, Monroe County, Florida; Jacksonville *Tri-Weekly Union*, January 10, 1874; Jacksonville *Daily Florida Union*, August 9, 1876.

How political organizing within the Cuban colony was effected is not clear, but to a great extent Cuban sympathies toward the Republican principles came naturally. The majority of the Cuban community leaders were educated, middle-class individuals residing in Key West primarily because of political persecution. Vigorously advocating independence for their own homeland and the abolition of slavery, these men had generally sympathized with the North during the Civil War. They logically joined Lincoln's party when they secured the right to vote. As leaders of the Cuban colony, they exerted strong influences over the mass of the tobacco workers and successfully molded them into a strong bloc vote for the Republican organization.

The Monroe County electorate, then, approached the elections of 1870 unaware of what effect the new, not yet clearly committed Cuban vote would have on county politics. Key West Republicans probably encouraged their colleagues in Tallahassee to demonstrate sympathy for the insurrectionary movement in progress in Cuba. During the legislative session of that year, Republican Senator William Purman introduced a favorable resolution regarding the Cuban situation which was adopted. On the national level, Florida Republican Congressman Charles Hamilton presented to the House of Representatives a series of pro-Cuba resolutions.⁴ In addition, Governor Harrison Reed cultivated Cuban support by appointing the first Cuban, Alejandro Mendoza, to a Monroe County position, that of justice of the peace.⁵ There was, however, a reluctance on the part of the national Republican administration to involve itself in the issue. President Grant's public statements in late 1869 and 1870 made it clear that he had no intention of aiding the Cuban insurrectionary effort.⁶ This attitude by the government in Washington would cause in the years ahead problems for the Republican party in Florida. For the time being, however, these gestures of sympathy for the Cuban cause could not have come at a more favorable moment for Florida Republicanism. Extremely agitated throughout 1869 and 1870 as a result of a

4. Florida *Senate Journal*, 1870, third session, 332; *Congressional Record*, 43rd Cong., 1st sess., v. 2, pt. VI, p. 5239; Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, June 28, 1870.

5. Key West *El Republicano*, January 22, 1870.

6. Ramiro Guerra, *Guerra de los Diez Años*, 2 vols. (Havana, 1972), II, 72, 79-90.

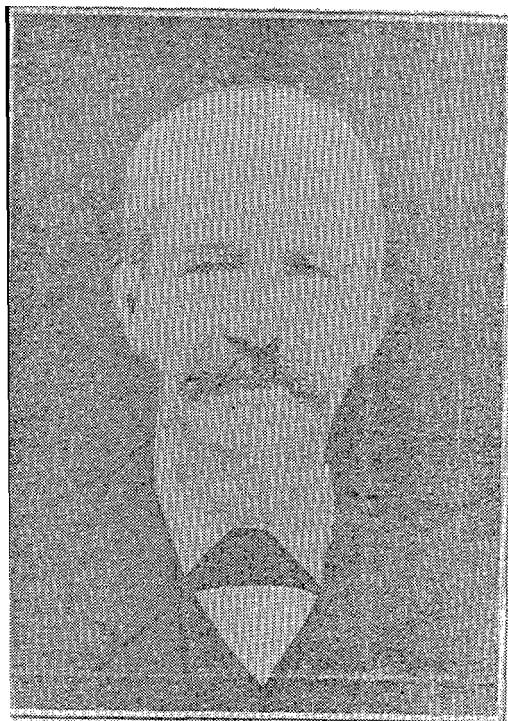
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CITY HALL KEY WEST

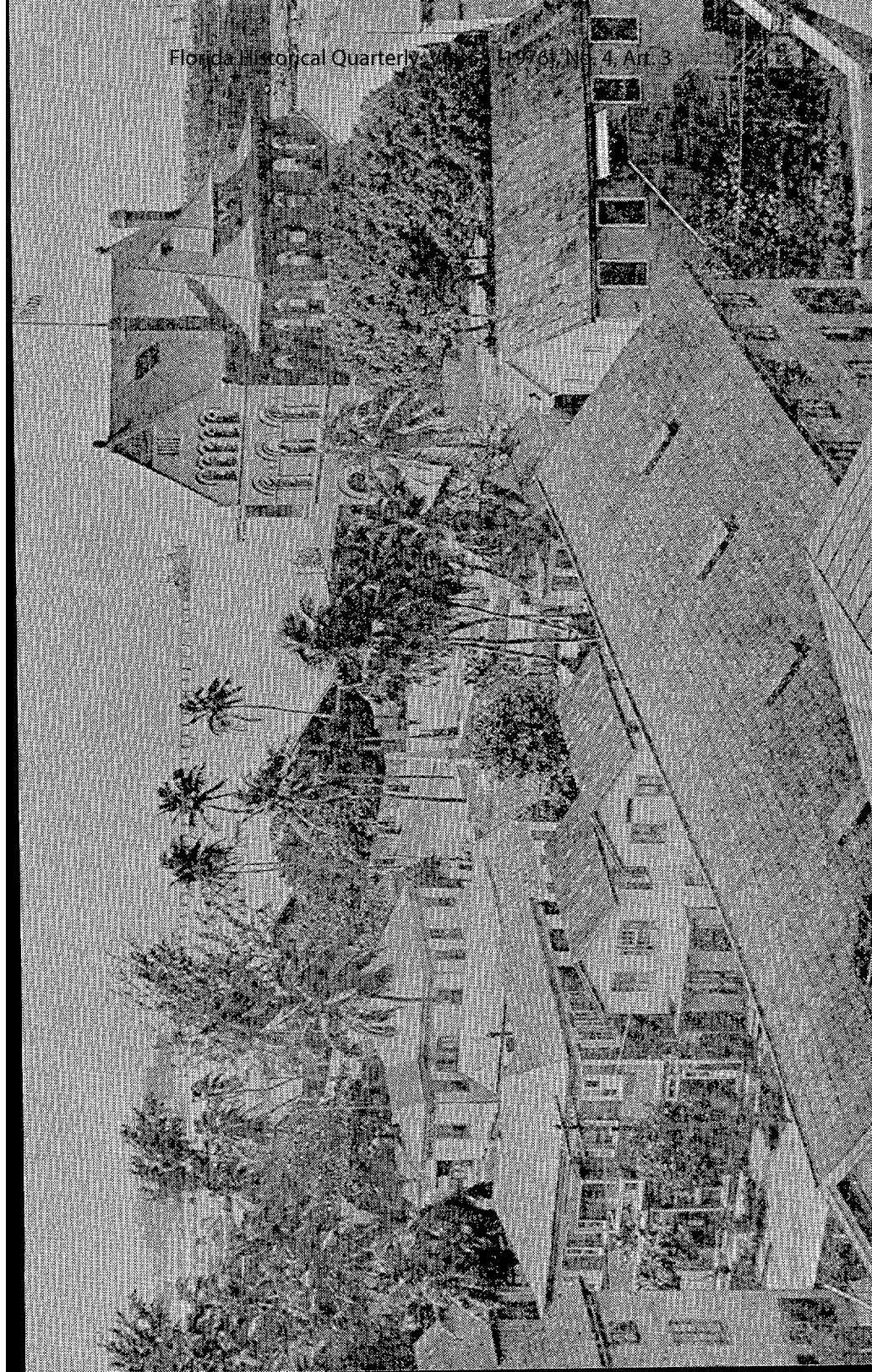
Dedicated July 4, 1876

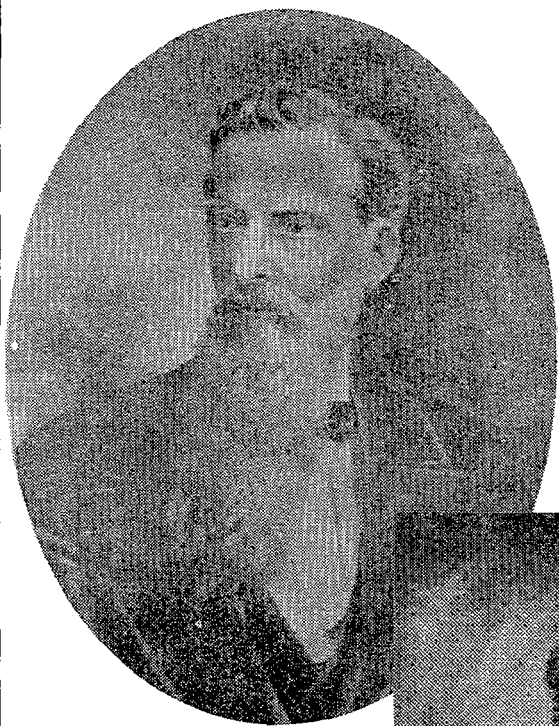
Dedication of Key West City Hall, July 4, 1876. Walter C. Maloney, *A Sketch of the History of Key West, Florida* (Gainesville, 1968), title page.



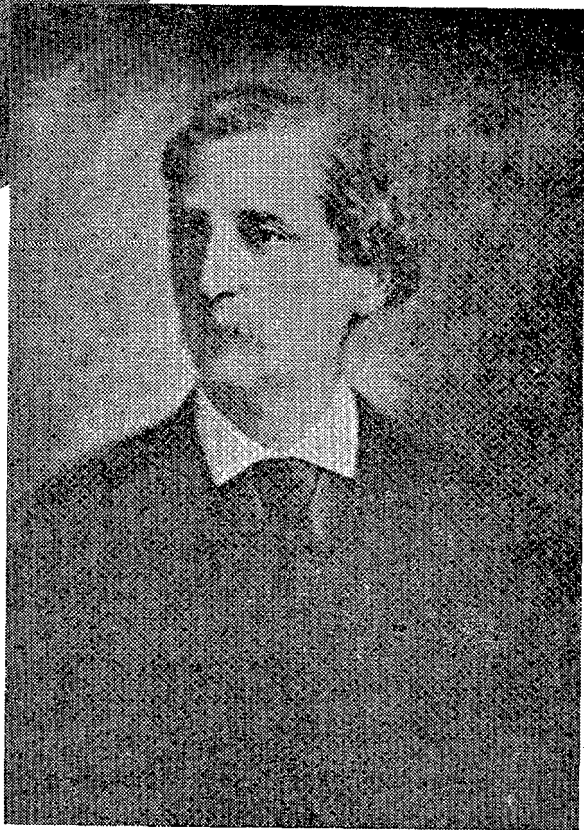
Juan Ma. Reyes (Nito Reyes)

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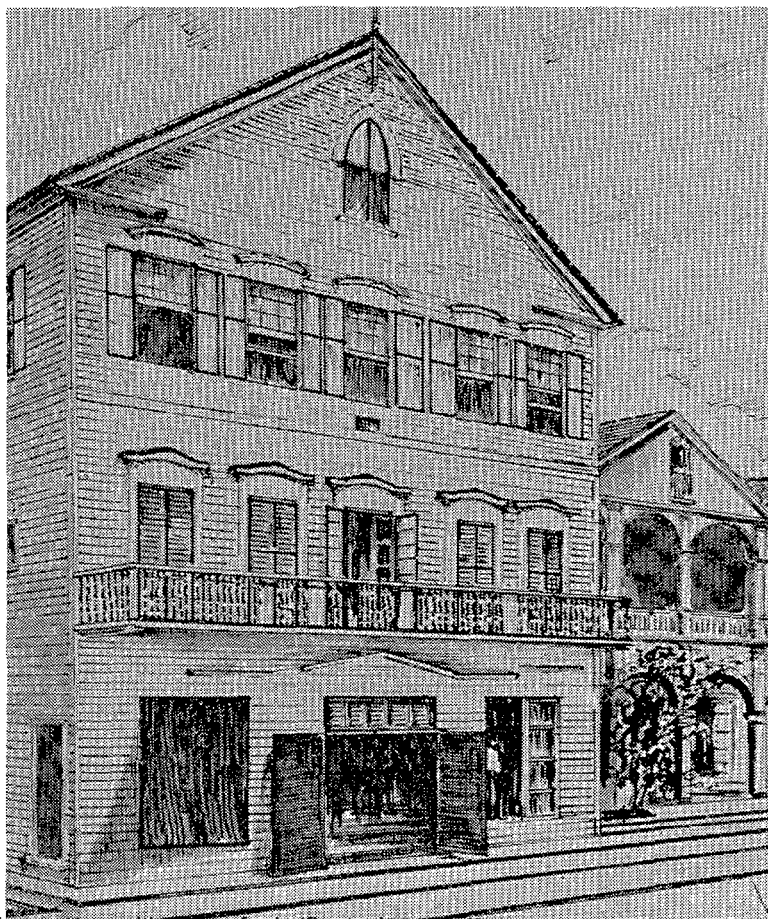
Francisco Vicente Aguilera.



Miguel de Aldama y Alfonso.



Gato Cigar Company. Zendegui, *Ambito de Marti*, 154.



<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol55/iss4/3>
Club San Carlos. Guillermo de Zendegui, *Ambito de Marti* (Havana, 1954), 152

series of incidents related to their revolutionary activities, the Cubans in Key West represented a highly politicized group receptive to organizing efforts of American politicians.⁷ Success rewarded the efforts of the local Republicans in the legislative race. H. A. Crane defeated Frederick Filer, the incumbent Democrat in the assembly race, while James Locke won over Democrat Walter Maloney, Jr., as senator from the twenty-fourth district.⁸ This Republican victory emphasized the effectiveness of their organization and the successes they could expect with added Cuban support. Monroe Republicans now held all the state legislature seats. The only important Democrat still in power was Mayor Browne, who had been re-elected in October 1870.⁹

Cuban loyalty to the Republican party led to individual rewards if not to national support for their cause. Intent on consolidating the Cuban bloc vote, Republican leaders lobbied in Tallahassee for patronage for Latin political organizers. Juan Maria Reyes was appointed justice of the peace in 1871, the second Cuban to hold that position. Within the next few years several of his compatriots received federal and county appointments, demonstrating to the Cubans the value of their bloc vote.¹⁰

Republican fortunes seemed to be continuing on the upswing in the election year of 1872 when the *Key West Dispatch*, a Democratic paper, closed its doors because of "insufficient patronage."¹¹ It henceforth became a Republican news-weekly with Representative Crane as publisher and Eldridge Ware as editor. There were other problems though in Key West which would have an impact on area politics. In early January 1872, there was a riot initiated by native black dock laborers who re-

7. These incidents are discussed in the following sources: Jerrell H. Shofner, *Nor Is It Over Yet: Florida in the Era of Reconstruction, 1863-1877* (Gainesville, 1974), 239; Manuel Deulofeu y Leonart, *Martí, Cayo Hueso y Tampa. La Emigración. Notas Historicas* (Cienfuegos, Cuba, 1905), 38-51; Luis F. LeRoy y Gálvez, "La Muerte de Castañón, Raíz de los Sucesos de Noviembre de 1871," *Revista de la Biblioteca Nacional José Martí* (May/August, 1970), 37-70; Key West *El Republicano*, February 12, 1870.

8. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, December 20, 1870.

9. Key West *El Republicano*, February 12, 1870. Browne was probably reelected as a result of Cuban support.

10. Tallahassee *Sentinel*, April 15, 1871; Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, December 12, 1871; Tallahassee *Sentinel*, September 25, 1875.

11. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, April 2, 1872.

sented the willingness of Bahamians to work for fifty cents less per day.¹² This animosity between two elements of the Republican constituency was potentially disruptive to party unity.

As the year progressed a more serious breach became evident in the Republican coalition. The national Democratic party, now identified as Liberal-Republican, gained strength in Monroe County, and an increasing number of white Republicans there endorsed its program.¹³ The anti-Cuban policies practiced by the Grant administration since late 1869 had continued unabated, and by mid-1872 it was obvious to Cubans that little could be expected for their cause from the Republican party. The Cuban junta in New York met with Liberal-Republican presidential aspirant Horace Greeley who expressed his support for Cuban independence. The president of the junta, Francisco V. Aguilera, communicated Greeley's attitude to other Cubans, including in all likelihood those in Key West.¹⁴ Monroe County Republicans tried to counteract the detrimental attitude of Washington, but the Cubans, having reevaluated their political position in the face of a sympathetic Greeley candidacy, were no longer as susceptible to Republican rhetoric. The third crack in the Monroe County Republican coalition became evident.

On October 10, a "solemn procession" carrying half-masted Cuban flags wound its way through the streets of Key West. Thus, as if to reemphasize to all before election day the overriding issue among Cubans, they began with great pomp and circumstance to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the declaration of Cuban independence. After honoring the patriotic dead, the procession, carrying flags, banners, and emblems, and accompanied by music, marched through the main streets of the city. It halted at the central square to listen to stirring speeches by supporters of the insurrection. The events concluded that evening with "splendid displays of pyrotecnics."¹⁵ All who

12. *Key West Dispatch*, quoted in *ibid.*, January 9, 1872. In November 1874 another riot took place. Jerrell H. Shofner, "Militant Negro Laborers in Reconstruction Florida," *Journal of Southern History*, XXXIX (August 1973), 407.

13. Jefferson B. Browne, *Key West, The Old and The New* (St. Augustine, 1912; facsimile edition, Gainesville, 1973), 135.

14. Shofner, *Nor Is It Over Yet*, 283; Eladio Aguilera Rojas, *Francisco V. Aguilera y la Revolución de Cuba de 1868*, 2 vols. (Havana, 1909), I, 205, 227.

15. *Key West Dispatch*, quoted in *Tallahassee Sentinel*, November 2, 1872.

observed these activities could not fail to realize the single most important motivating factor in the Cuban community.

Even the incorporation of a pro-Cuban resolution in the state Republican party platform could not alter the Monroe County Democratic sweep. Greeley's favorable attitude had assured him and the Florida Democrats the Cuban vote in Monroe County.¹⁶ The split in Republican ranks and wholesale Cuban defection led to Democratic victories by margins of two to one. Because of his political affiliation, even Republican congressional candidate William Purman, who had been vocal in his support of the patriot cause since 1870, could not attract the Cuban vote.

Although the county Republican hierarchy lamented the setback in their political fortunes, they felt it to be only a temporary situation. Indeed, in January 1873, characterized by an atmosphere of conciliation, a celebration on the occasion of the anniversary of emancipation brought together the black citizens of Key West and the representatives of the various Republican factions. A large contingent of Cubans participated in the procession, and the speakers included Juan M. Reyes.¹⁷ Because of political expediency many Cubans had supported the Democratic party the previous November, and then re-established their Republican allegiance. The temporary nature of the Cuban defection became apparent in the municipal and senate elections of 1873 as the Republicans emerged victorious.

By the end of 1873 the Cuban vote was obviously the decisive factor in Monroe County politics. Republicans, with support from the Cuban community, were successful in 1870 and 1873, but fared poorly in 1872 when the Latins defected to the opposition. Many white southern voters joined the Democratic party with the demise of the Liberal Republicans, thus making the Cubans of even greater importance to the Republican party. Without the Cuban bloc vote the Republicans in Monroe County would find it difficult to be successful.

The Cuban question attracted national attention again in November 1873, when a Cuban filibustering expedition was captured by a Spanish man-of-war. Patriot hopes for reinvigorating their cause had ridden on the hoped-for success of the expedi-

16. *Key West Dispatch*, January 4, 1873.

17. *Ibid.*

tion. Flying a United States flag and captained by an American citizen, the *Virginus* arrived under armed escort at Santiago de Cuba, where the Spanish authorities proceeded to execute fifty-three members of the expedition, including several citizens of the United States. An international outcry indicated that at last the Spanish had gone too far. The United States protested vigorously and naval forces began to assemble at Key West. The Cubans there prepared for the long-awaited final effort, but it became quickly apparent that President Grant preferred to seek a peaceful solution to the incident. He opposed any involvement in the insurrection either by declaring war or recognizing the belligerent status of the Cuban republic. To the dismay of Florida Republicans, once again Washington had turned its back on the Cuban cause.

If the Republicans hoped to retain Cuban support for the 1874 elections they would have to keep the Latin leaders in the party. Party principles and political patronage were the answers. Cubans received enough appointments to retain their loyalty. Then, in early 1874, Colonel Carlos Manuel de Cespedes, son of the late president of the republic-in-arms, arrived in Key West where he quickly became one of the community's most influential political leaders. His adherence to the Republican party gave the organization another strong influence among the tobacco workers who had been dedicated supporters of the late president.

In February 1874, former vice-president and now president of the Cuban republic, Francisco V. Aguilera, arrived in Key West to raise funds to launch an expedition and effect his return to Cuba. Money was raised among the tobacco workers, though Aguilera noticed the Cuban black population had withdrawn from the organizing efforts of the community. A dedicated revolutionary, Aguilera expressed dismay at this situation. Immediately he called a meeting of the black leaders, explained to them the goals of the revolution-independence and the abolition of slavery— and won their confidence. Upon his return to New York, Reyes continued to organize the Cubans, not only on behalf of the independence movement, but in support of the Republican party.¹⁸ Reyes's political organizing and Cespedes's

18. Francisco Vicente Aguilera, *Francisco Vicente Aguilera: Epistolario*

moral influence did much for the Republicans in Monroe County in 1874.

Gaining support of the Cuban leaders, however, did not always ensure the bloc vote. Only candidates demonstrating solid pro-Cuban sympathies could hope to win that decisive element in Monroe County. In 1874 Florida's representatives in the Congress included Senator Simon Conover and Representatives William Purman and Josiah Walls, who together strongly supported Cuban independence. This support probably stemmed as much from a genuine sympathy for the ends sought, as for concern for the upcoming elections. Between January and the end of June, Walls, Conover, and Purman all delivered addresses in the halls of Congress urging that body and the president to grant belligerent status to the Cuban republic.¹⁹

The *Key West Dispatch* ensured that these speeches gained wide circulation among the Cubans by publishing translated versions.²⁰ Given the cigar industry's custom of employing a "reader" in each establishment, it is possible that virtually every registered Cuban in the city heard each speech word for word. In addition, on the state level, incumbent Senator Edward Howe introduced a pro-Cuban resolution in the legislature thus associating himself with the Cuban cause and heightening his chances for reelection.²¹ The Republican candidates had disassociated themselves from the Grant administration's Cuba policy and were confident of receiving the Cuban vote.

While the Monroe County Republican organization rallied its forces to insure the vote of the Cubans, the Democrats were not idle. Their strategy included a bid for the bloc vote which had benefited them so substantially in 1872. On the eve of the election, John Henderson, Democratic congressional candidate, arrived in Key West accompanied by Charles Dyke, editor of the *Tallahassee Weekly Floridian* and one of the most influential and effective Democratic politicians in Florida. It is likely that these men attempted to convince the Cubans that the Republican party had little interest in aiding the Cuban independence move-

(Havana, 1974), 137-43; Aleida Plasencia, ed., *Bibliografía de la Guerra de los Diez Años* (Havana, 1968), 190.

19. *Congressional Record*, 43rd Cong., 1st sess., pt. 6, 5245-56; 5423-26; Appendix, 27.

20. Jacksonville *The New South*, September 9, 1874.

21. Florida *Senate Journal*, 1874, 43.

ment, reminding the Cubans of the hostile attitude of the national administration to their cause.²²

On election day the Democrats won by a narrow margin. While most of the Cubans supported the Republican candidates, the Democrats carried the county.²³ The local Republican organization realized that only through a change of policy on the national level could their declining fortunes among the Cuban voters be halted. Ideals and patronage continued to entice the Cuban leadership, and they could be counted on for unwavering support. The grass-root bloc vote, however, was slowly disintegrating, and it became clear that a new strategy was needed if the Republicans hoped to maintain control of the city mayor's office, the only important elective position still in their hands.

In July 1875, a disturbing incident occurred that complicated the political situation in Key West. The national economic crisis that struck the nation in the latter part of 1873 created the first tensions between labor and capital in the local tobacco industry. Undoubtedly aware of the potential threat of the depression on their security, the cigar workers began organizing in early 1874.²⁴ A strike occurred during the summer of 1875 when the factory owners declared a general wage reduction. A strike committee immediately was organized by Federico de Armas, president of the Cuban revolutionary organization *Asociacion del Sur*. By August, however, the workers were forced to submit to terms imposed by the owners. Reyes, in contact with the junta in New York, wrote that in retaliation for the strike the capitalists were prohibiting the traditional practice of raising funds in the factories for the support of the revolution and for San Carlos, the community combination mutual aid, social, and educational institution, a vital function of the Latin community.²⁵

Although the connection with the strike is not clear, it seems probable that Carlos Manuel de Cespedes's decision to seek the mayor's office stemmed at least in part from a perceived threat to the Cuban workingmen. It is highly likely that he

22. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, November 17, 1874; Jacksonville *Tri-Weekly Union*, December 22, 1874.

23. Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, November 10, 17, 1874.

24. Jacksonville *The New South*, July 18, 1874.

25. Plasencia, *Bibliografia*, 191.

campaigned more as a Cuban than as an adherent of any political group, as the threat to the security of the tobacco workers came from an economic sector whose membership included Republicans.²⁶

The Monroe County Republican hierarchy opted to support Republican Cespedes, hoping thereby to attract the Cuban vote. Cespedes was elected along with one Cuban alderman.²⁷ Republicans failed otherwise, and the Democrats carried the city council.²⁸ In effect, the Cuban electorate voted as Cubans, not as Republicans; their failure to support other Republican candidates resulted in a Democratic victory.

The year 1876 opened with a conciliatory tone. The editor of the *Key of the Gulf*, who had opposed Cespedes's candidacy after initially having "had his feelings lacerated by the new Mayor of Key West sitting on the bench with a cigar in his mouth," decided, subsequent to several months of observing the mayor, that "he is making a good officer, very firm and thoroughly impartial."²⁹ Conciliation, however, soon fell victim to the aroused passions stemming from the initiation of the national and state political campaigns that year.

State politics quickly became a burning issue within Republican ranks. The by-now traditional factional challenges to the regular party hierarchy again created havoc within the state organization. United States Senator Simon Conover declared his intention to seek the Florida gubernatorial nomination for the Republican party, thus directly challenging Marcellus Stearns, the incumbent, who did the same. The Cubans in Key West reacted favorably to Conover's announcement.³⁰ The Republican faction in Congress led by Conover and William Purman consistently supported Cuban interests, and had been influential in securing federal offices in the Key West Customs House for Cespedes and Manuel Govin, another

26. One example of a Republican cigar manufacturer was Mr. E. B. Rawson. *Tallahassee Sentinel*, February 12, 1876; *Tallahassee Weekly Floridian*, October 31, 1876; U. S. Census Office, Tenth Census, 1880, microfilm, Monroe County, Florida, precinct 3, page 25, number 3.

27. Walter Maloney, *A Sketch of the History of Key West, Florida* (Newark, New Jersey, 1876; facsimile edition, Gainesville, 1968), 76; *Tallahassee Weekly Floridian*, October 19, 1875.

28. *Tallahassee Weekly Floridian*, November 9, 1875.

29. *Key West Key of the Gulf*, quoted in *Tallahassee Weekly Floridian*, November 23, 1875, January 11, 1876.

30. *Tallahassee Weekly Floridian*, May 30, 1876.

Cuban community leader. Notwithstanding President Grant's negative attitude to Conover as a candidate, the Cuban leadership could justify remaining within the Republican ranks.

Conover and Purman lobbied actively for Latin support; a victory in Monroe County necessarily meant securing virtually all of the 1,032 registered Cuban voters. Again the Cuban leadership was courted. Govin and Cespedes had been removed from their positions in the customs house for alleged malfeasance, and efforts were made to find other government appointments. In July, the highly prized position of postmaster of Jacksonville went to Govin, and attempts were made, although in vain, to reinstate Mayor Cespedes in the customs house. In addition, no doubt to influence Miguel Aldama, the president of the Cuban junta in New York, Conover and Purman obtained the appointment of Southern District Attorney for Isaac Carrillo, Aldama's son-in-law.³¹

Notwithstanding the Conover challenge and Monroe County opposition to the established Republican hierarchy, Marcellus Stearns received the party's nomination. Nevertheless, Monroe County Republicans, Cuban as well as North American, continued to oppose Stearns until early September, when a reconciliation in the state organization lured these elements back into the mainstream of the party and in support of the party's nominee.³²

The Cuban leadership in Key West now found itself in a difficult situation. Popular sentiment among Cubans disapproved of the regular Republican leaders on both the national and state levels, but their leadership endorsed the party candidates.³³ Concurrently with these events, the Democrats established contact with the New York junta and convinced Miguel Aldama, representative of the most conservative element of the revolutionary effort, to support publicly the Democratic presidential ticket and to encourage the Cubans in Key West to do the same.³⁴

31. Jerrell H. Shofner, "Cuban Revolutionaries and the 1876 Election Dispute," *American Chronicle*, I (February 1972), 23-24.

82. Jacksonville *Daily Florida Union*, October 3, 5, 1876; Shofner, *Nor Is It Over Yet*, 306.

33. Key West *Key of the Gulf*, July 8, 1876; Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, August 15, 1876.

34. Shofner, "Cuban Revolutionaries," 25. The president of the Cuban junta in 1876 was Miguel Aldama, a wealthy Havana sugar planter. He held no military title. Shofner's "General Aldaine" is a misspelling.

The decision by Cuban Republicans to endorse Governor Stearns and presidential aspirant Rutherford B. Hayes, and Aldama's decision to support the Democratic ticket, produced dissent within the Key West Latin community. A Cuban Democratic club was formed, led by Lorenzo Jimenez, a new and prestigious personality in Key West (having recently escaped from a Spanish prison), and Angel Loño, another well-known Cuban. The new club quickly gained adherents and claimed a membership of approximately 200-300 as opposed to the estimated 800 in its Republican counterpart. Incensed at the interference of Aldama in local politics, Republican Federico Hortsman informed the secretary of the junta that although he recognized the authority of that New York body, he refused to obey directives that he felt detrimental to the interests of his colored compatriots, thus revealing a repugnance toward southern Democratic racial attitudes. To the joy of the Democratic party, a split had developed in the Cuban community, and their powerful bloc vote was apparently defused.³⁵ Confirmation of the effect of this on Republican fortunes emerged in the mayoralty race in early October when the entire Democratic ticket except for one alderman was elected. The Democratic mayoral candidate received a majority of 141 votes.³⁶ The members of the Cuban Democratic Club had made a great difference in the election.

The Republicans, however, had one last strategic maneuver to unveil which they hoped would save the situation in the upcoming county election. A candidate still had to be found for the assembly seat from Monroe County. Without the Cuban bloc vote, the Republicans could not hope to carry the county, and having witnessed in 1875 how a Cuban candidate could unite the electorate, the decision to nominate Carlos Manuel de Cespedes for the office seemed a natural measure.³⁷ Although this Republican strategy had backfired in the municipal elections of the previous year, the election for the assembly involved only one man, a Cuban, and a loyal Republican at that.

35. Plascencia, *Bibliografía*, 192; Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, August 29, 1876; Jacksonville *Daily Florida Union*, May 10, November 7, 1876.

36. Key West *Key of the Gulf*, quoted in Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian*, October 31, 1876.

37. *Tallahassee Sentinel*, October 21, 1876.

The campaign to unite the Cuban vote began. The Jacksonville *Daily Florida Union*, which supported Governor Stearns, ran a lengthy article on October 25 urging the Washington administration to effect a change of policy regarding the Cuban question. Manuel Govin, now residing in Jacksonville, traveled to Key West during the last week in October to sponsor a mass meeting of Cubans in support of the Republican party. A grand demonstration of approximately 1,000 gathered at the wharf to meet the postmaster, and the Republican County Committee officially greeted him, as did the Key West cornet band. At the scheduled meeting in the densely packed San Carlos Hall, Govin delivered an address revealing the reasons for the traditional Cuban support of the Republican party and urged his audience to continue in the same fashion. Govin acknowledged that President Grant had offered little support to the insurgents, but he questioned whether the Democrats, once in power, would do otherwise. He emphasized that Tilden, the Democratic presidential nominee, had never made any statements that could be construed as favorable to the insurgent struggle, and given these facts, he argued, the Cuban voter was reduced to principles. The Republican party espoused the same progressive principles declared at Yara and incorporated into the constitution of their republic, and generally, represented freedom, liberalism, and humanitarian ideals. On the other hand, the Democrats Govin compared to the Spanish slavers and reactionary political elements then in control of Cuba. The Democrats espoused dangerous concepts. The meeting concluded with a long procession accompanied by *La Libertad* band playing the "Himno de Riego," "the revolutionary song of the red Republicans of Spain." The meeting produced encouraging results for the Republican party. Lorenzo Jimenez, one of the organizers of the Cuban Democrats, shifted to the Republican side taking ninety compatriots with him. By all appearances the Republican strategy had proved successful, and Cuban unity became virtually a reality. On election day only sixty Cubans voted the Democratic ticket.³⁸

It became quickly apparent, however, that in the election at Key West, as well as in many other areas of the state and county, there were many irregularities. After much dispute the

38. Jacksonville *Daily Florida Union*, November 20, 1876.

official canvass revealed a Democratic victory in Monroe County by a slim margin of sixty-seven votes.³⁹ The Cubans had performed well for the Republican party, but once again, as in 1874, enough Cubans voted the Democratic ticket or abstained to give the county a Democratic majority. The campaign proved especially divisive to the Cuban community, and great resentment developed against Miguel Aldama who was held responsible for the formation of the Cuban Democratic opposition and the defeat of Cespedes. So acute were the antagonisms that the Cuban Republicans raised an official protest to the Cuban government against the representative in New York.⁴⁰

As the Democrats gained control of Florida politics and Cubans began to lose their state and federal appointments, it became clear that their involvement in United States national politics was ending.⁴¹ As if to signal the termination of an era, one of the leading Cuban political figures in Key West, Juan Maria Reyes, met a tragic end as he returned from participating as a witness at the Tallahassee State Investigating Committee looking into the election of 1876. As the steamer *Amelia* approached Key West, it foundered, claiming seven persons, one of whom was the Cuban revolutionary organizer.⁴²

Upon arriving in Key West the Cuban emigres had recognized the opportunity to aid the revolutionary process in their homeland through political action in their new place of residence. All significant political decisions evolved from the recognition that the independence struggle represented the foremost political concern of the community. Although initially the Republican party monopolized the benefits of the Latin influx, primarily because of Cuban political ideals and the effective use of patronage by Republican officials, when it became clear that Washington was unwilling to back the insurrectionary movement, the Cuban bloc vote could no longer be considered a solid Republican constituency. Given the circumstances of Florida Reconstruction politics that caused the shift of white Floridians to the Democratic party, the Cuban vote became in-

39. See Shofner's *Nor Is It Over Yet* for a detailed discussion of the controversial election, and his article "Cuban Revolutionaries" for an account of the role played by the Cubans in the election.

40. Plasencia, *Bibliografía*, 192.

41. *Jacksonville Daily Florida Union*, January 8, 15, April 24, 25, 1877.

42. *Ibid.*, January 3, 4, 1877.

creasingly essential to Key West Republicans. The vote had to be delivered virtually intact for the Republicans to emerge victorious after 1873, but because of the negative attitude of the Grant administration, it became increasingly difficult to effect this goal. Under the circumstances the Cubans embraced political expediency in order to aid the revolutionary cause. Although, as far as can be determined, the traditional Cuban Republican leaders remained loyal to their party, and usually retained the majority of Cubans behind them, sufficient dissent appeared among Cubans disgusted with national Republicans to dilute the all important bloc vote and send the Republicans down to defeat on numerous occasions.

Cubans continued to exert a vital influence in Key West politics after 1876. But with the Democrats in control and the threatened demise of the revolutionary movement, a new situation emerged, and the emphasis of Cuban concerns shifted from what by now was perceived as fruitless activity in United States politics to a more direct, active, and radical involvement in Cuban politics in the hope of achieving a successful reinvigoration of the independence movement.