

Anarchist Straits

Cuba's War for Independence and the Origins of the Caribbean Network

The flag of independence that waves in the countryside is not just the flag of one determined party; it does not represent only the protest against Spanish domination. Rather, it represents the virile protest of all tyrannized and exploited people who make a supreme effort to attain their freedom.

El Esclavo, Tampa, March 7, 1895

When the anarchist newspaper *El Esclavo* published these words, Cuba's anticolonial war versus Spain was only two weeks old. Over the coming months, the fight for independence did not go as well as Cuban rebels had hoped. Just months after the war began, Spaniards killed rebel leader José Martí. More broadly, Spanish troops were holding their own against the guerrillas. The rebel army needed help, which increasingly came from the anarchist-led working class across the Florida Straits in Key West and Tampa. Small waves of Florida-based freedom fighters picked up guns, invaded Cuba, and fought for its liberation. Enrique Creci (Figure 1.1) was one of them. In early 1896, he stood on the shores of Matanzas Province, east of Havana. He was not some average rebel soldier. As a Cuban-born cigar roller and anarchist agitator, he had published the anarchist *Archivo Social* in which he openly called for rebellion against the Spanish Crown. When war broke out, he relocated to Tampa.¹ Soon, he joined the independence forces, became a captain in a column led by rebel General Enrique Collazo, and in 1896 participated in an assault on Matanzas from a base of operations in Key West.

¹ Olga Cabrera, "Enrique Creci: un patriota obrero." *Santiago* 36 (December 1979): 146.

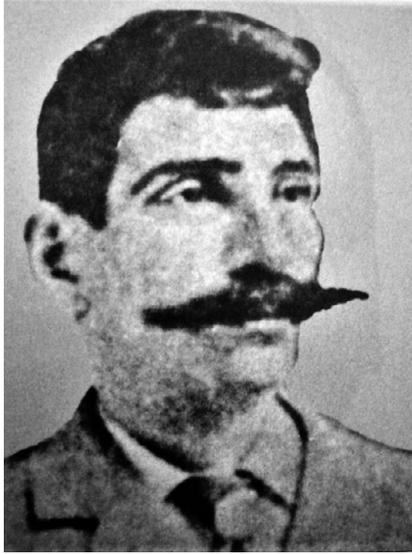


FIGURE 1.1 Enrique Creci, a leading anarchist in Cuba in the 1890s who found refuge in Florida before joining a military expedition in 1896 to cast off Spanish colonial rule from the island, dying soon after.
Author's personal collection

However, in a battle shortly after arriving in Matanzas, Spanish forces captured and executed him.²

Over the following years, Creci became an anarchist martyr. In May 1897, Tampa's anarchists memorialized his death. In the same issue of *El Esclavo* in which they commemorated the eleventh anniversary of the Haymarket Square bombing in Chicago, the editors recalled Creci's valiant efforts and the way he died: "Our sick comrade, found prostrated and in pain lying in a bed in one of the revolutionaries' rural field hospitals, was attacked and murdered by a gang of paid assassins like the kinds of dogs that [Spanish officials] Weyler and Cánovas set upon the people who want to shake off their brutal and degrading yoke."³ Creci's armed actions and then his death became part of the anarchist propaganda campaign in Florida and Cuba as anarchists rallied to support a war to free the island.

² Shaffer, *Anarchism and Countercultural Politics*, 43–44; Joan Casanovas Codina, *Bread, or Bullets! Urban Labor and Spanish Colonialism in Cuba, 1850–1898* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998), 227.

³ *El Esclavo*, May 19, 1897, 4; *Risveglio*, June 1913, 2–3.

Caribbean anarchism was transnational from its birth. The trans-Straits alliance that anarchists mobilized during the war had been forged over the previous decades. It emerged in the labor organizations of Cuba and southern Florida during the 1870s and 1880s. By 1873, Key West had become the most important manufacturing city in Florida, producing 25 million cigars per year largely using migrant labor from Cuba. Industrial Florida expanded in 1886 when cigar factory owner Vicente Martínez Ybor relocated his production facilities from Havana and Key West to the outskirts of Tampa. Martínez Ybor hoped to escape the growing labor movement that anarchists increasingly influenced. To this end, he negotiated a land deal with the Tampa Board of Trade to create a new company town, Ybor City, and began hiring Spanish, Italian, Cuban, and US tobacco workers.⁴ But apparently Martínez Ybor had not counted on the fact that among the throngs of migrating workers would come the very anarchist agitators from whom he had sought to escape in the first place. In 1887, anarchists Enrique Messonier and Creci successfully organized workers in Key West. By 1888, the recently formed, anarchist-influenced *Alianza Obrera* (Labor Alliance) based in Havana began to organize tobacco industry workers throughout Tampa and Key West. In Cuba, anarchist cigar makers Messonier and Enrique Roig San Martín established a school for workers. By the 1880s, anarchists centered in Cuba's tobacco industry dominated leadership positions in the island's labor movement. They launched the weekly newspaper *El Productor*, which had correspondents from around metropolitan Havana as well as Key West and Tampa.⁵ Then, anarchist-led strikes erupted in 1889, including a general strike that October in Key West that resulted in the owners agreeing to a pay raise for tobacco workers. In the early 1890s, anarchists from Spain and Cuba further organized radical activities and institutions in Havana and Florida.⁶

Thus, the rise of Florida's anarchist movement mirrored its rise in Havana. This only made sense considering the constant circular migration of workers, anarchists, and anarchist newspapers between the two cities. The Havana-based *El Productor*, *El Obrero*, and *Archivo*

⁴ Mormino and Pozzetta, "Spanish Anarchism in Tampa," 175–177.

⁵ Evan Matthew Daniel, "Cuban Cigar Makers in Havana, Key West, and Ybor City, 1850s–1890s: A Single Universe?," in *In Defiance of Boundaries: Anarchism in Latin American History*, eds. Geoffroy de Laforcade and Kirwin Shaffer (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015), 30.

⁶ Frank Fernández, *Cuban Anarchism: The History of a Movement* (Tucson: Sharp Press, 2001), 21–23; Daniel, "Cuban Cigar Makers," 33–44.

Social commented on issues central to workers in both Cuba and Florida. In 1894, Tampa's anarchists began publishing their first newspaper, *El Esclavo*, which found readers from New York to Havana. Anarchists published the paper almost weekly from June 1894 to March 1898. The paper sought to be "the defender of workers' interests, with no regard to workers' origins" and became a favorite to be read by the *lectores*.⁷

In this chapter, we see how *El Esclavo* played a key role in the emerging anarchist network around three important themes in the 1890s: the US labor scene, US politics for an audience with almost no experience in political republican democracy, and Cuba's independence struggle against Spain. This Florida experience would teach anarchists much about the postwar Caribbean, in particular the dilemmas of cross-ethnic unionization, their rejection of representative democracy as little more than a neocolonial tool for the elite to retain power, and their belief that political independence had to follow, not precede, a workers-based social revolution.

MIGRANT ANARCHISTS AND US LABOR

Anarchists launched *El Esclavo* in 1894 during a cigar worker strike at the Cheroots factory in Tampa. Shortly after the strike, an anonymous author suggested that the effectiveness of this labor action would be a bellwether for future labor actions, "not in Tampa, nor in Florida, rather for *habano* cigar rollers all over the United States . . . and Havana."⁸ As one of *El Esclavo*'s early writers, Maximino Goicoitía, reminded readers, "All of us are brothers in nature, and therefore we hate and want to obliterate frontiers" that divide workers.⁹ With this internationalist sentiment, Tampa's anarchists began to interpret the North American labor scene for workers arriving from Cuba and Spain.

The first US labor issue for Tampa's anarchists was the Pullman Strike, initiated in May 1894 just as they launched the newspaper. Pullman, Illinois was a company town like Ybor City. While Ybor was built on the outskirts of Tampa, Pullman was built adjacent to Chicago. By July, federal troops had intervened on behalf of the Pullman Palace Car Company, breaking the strike. US government actions also helped to break the

⁷ Gerald Poyo, "The Anarchist Challenge to the Cuban Independence Movement, 1885–1890," *Cuban Studies* 15, no. 1 (1985): 35; *El Esclavo*, June 9, 1894, 4.

⁸ *El Esclavo*, June 13, 1894, 2. ⁹ *Ibid.*, June 20, 1894, 1–2.

American Railway Union led by Eugene V. Debs. Tampa's anarchists quickly responded. J. Cerraí celebrated the intensity of the strikes but also urged anarchists to note that the very Americans who wanted slavery's abolition had in many cases become the same ones who wanted to enslave workers into conditions worse than those of the United States's southern slaves: "Workers that speak our language, are, without doubt, those who ought to learn from the observed conduct of the federal government of this nation."¹⁰

This dismal picture of the United States grew bleaker when combined with an understanding of labor conditions that workers faced there. "Souveraine" portrayed the treatment of poor Spanish-speaking female workers in New York. He claimed that *despalilladoras* (female destemmers of tobacco leaves) were being forced to submit to every bestial whim of shop owners and managers, such as how, in one factory, the owner's son assaulted a young married female worker. When the woman's husband attacked him, the manager beat up the husband and both lost their jobs.¹¹

Of course, it was horrendous that an Anglo boss's son could rape your wife, but the overall workplace and living conditions themselves were health hazards for all workers. Ybor City's boosters promoted it as a rationally planned city, but by 1894 little existed to support that image. The factories were the community's center. Around these factories, workers found flimsy, small wooden houses clustered together or took shelter in boarding houses. As one depiction of the city's early days concluded, Ybor City's first decade of existence "reflected the rawness of a mining camp and the dangers of a frontier presidio."¹²

Before the discovery of mosquitoes serving as vectors for the transfer of diseases like malaria, few people understood the health concerns surrounding large, stagnant sources of water. But some anarchists had their suspicions. In June 1894, one anonymous writer to *El Esclavo* noted how Ybor City was full of canals, which the writer suspected had something to do with disease and illness in the city. So, the writer asked rhetorically, if there were such a connection, then why not drain the canals and nearby swamps? He answered his own question by repeating a rumor: Doctors and pharmacists did not want to drain the canals, swamps, and lagoons because to do so would put them out of the business of treating the sick.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, July 24, 1894, 1. ¹¹ *Ibid.*, July 31, 1894, 2.

¹² Mormino and Pozzetta, "Spanish Anarchism in Tampa," 176–178.

Such claims were common in anarchist critiques of health and medicine in the early twentieth century.¹³

Anarchists also painted an unsavory picture of life inside American factories. Every day, hundreds of tobacco workers labored side by side in a factory, sorting, de-stemming, and rolling tobacco leaves. They often drank from the same single water source – maybe even the same cup. Such conditions favored the spread of diseases like tuberculosis. Since people from fourteen to seventy years old, male and female, worked in the factories, a wide stratum of the population was vulnerable to the spread of disease in the workplace. In addition, factories kept their doors and windows closed during the workday, exacerbating the hot, sweaty, closed confines of the factories.¹⁴

Medical costs like those for doctors and medicines were generally beyond the reach of an average worker; thus, working-class mothers frequently worked outside the home to earn money not only for food and housing, but also healthcare. This could have disastrous effects on children. Goicoitia cited an unnamed study that found infant mortality rose from 152/1000 to 195/1000 when the mother worked outside the home.¹⁵ While not couched as a critique of working mothers – though to be sure it did assume a certain patriarchal, *machista* quality – Goicoitia was suggesting that if males' wages were higher, then fathers would earn enough money to pay medical expenses while mothers stayed home with their children. In essence, he and other anarchists charged that by paying workers low wages, Martínez Ybor and the other factory owners were responsible for child death.

From October 1894 to February 1895, tobacco workers and anarchists from Havana to New York conducted a series of labor actions to improve wages and conditions. Spanish and Cuban workers in Florida regularly donated money to a tobacco worker strike in New York in January 1895. In the week before war began in Cuba, tobacco workers at Tampa's La Rosa and Monné factories went on strike. The "Manifesto to Tobacco-Working People in General," published at the same time as *El Esclavo* was serializing Peter Kropotkin's *Conquest of Bread*, promised workers that "our triumph is the triumph of all workers in Florida, of all workers in the United States."¹⁶

¹³ *El Esclavo*, June 28, 1894, 4; July 12, 1894, 2; July 18, 1894, 3. For the anarchist critique of health in Cuba, see Shaffer, *Anarchism and Countercultural Politics*, 107–161.

¹⁴ *El Esclavo*, July 24, 1894, 3–4. ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, August 8, 1894, 2–3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, February 21, 1895, 2–3.

El Esclavo sought to take the gleam off what many migrant workers might have thought the United States represented. Such depictions of labor conditions in Florida helped anarchists frame their image of the international struggle so that whether in Spain, Cuba, the United States, Puerto Rico, or elsewhere, workers should understand that their true allies were each other no matter where they worked or where they were born. The American workplace was no better than any other capitalist factory in Cuba, Puerto Rico, or Spain. Workers across the Straits needed to aid each other, and in Florida that meant transnational tobacco workers had to wage economic warfare against “American” capitalists – whether those capitalists were Anglo Americans or Spanish migrants from Cuba.

MIGRANT ANARCHISTS AND US DEMOCRACY

For anarchists arriving from monarchical traditions in Spain and colonial despotism in Cuba, US republican democracy could hold a certain allure – at least initially. American rhetoric and mythology promoted the ideal of the common man playing a valuable, vital, and honored role in the political development of the United States. Whether it was Jeffersonian notions of a yeoman democracy or a constitution that protected free speech and assembly, Spanish and Cuban anarchists initially were attracted to a country and a system that appeared so radically different than their despotic homelands. When the Statue of Liberty was dedicated in 1886 – just eight years before the founding of *El Esclavo* – anarchist immigrants could be forgiven for thinking that the United States was a place where working men and women from around the world could come, unite, and work for a better collective future full of freedom. Of course, reality cut through the mythology, as anarchists soon discovered. Republicanism might give average men a political voice, but it could also be a tool to deceive those very people and maintain the capitalist status quo. After all, if 1886 was the year of the Statue of Liberty’s dedication, it was also the year of the Haymarket Square Affair in Chicago.

An anonymous writer perhaps best expressed this conflicted image of the United States in June 1894. In a column titled “Una ilusión desvanecida” (The Faded Illusion), the author noted that to some anarchists, representative government could be a viable mechanism for people to govern themselves. This was impossible in the Europe that they knew, so “we then cast our gaze toward America, toward the virgin America, young and beautiful in whose breast those hungry and tyrannized

Europeans fled to find refuge . . . The American land was the most propitious to establish and practice the principles of republicanism in all its purity.” But after they arrived in the United States, they saw how the government “of the people” always sided with the minority bourgeoisie against the working majority. The government truly was of the rich, and for them as well. The fact that workers could vote “is a great farce that only serves to clinch tighter the workers’ own chains.” “Revolutionary socialism,” i.e., anarchism, was the only answer.¹⁷

A central tenet of the American democratic mythology is that there is no class warfare in the United States. Every person who is willing to work can aspire to their goals. The United States provides everyone an equal opportunity. As a result, rigid, generational class structures are a throwback to Europe. Or, if there are examples of class conflict, they are not symptomatic of the overall American capitalist democracy. It did not take long for anarchists in Tampa to attack this myth, too.¹⁸ J. C. Campos, an anarchist who could be found at various times in Tampa, New York, and Havana – and whose writings introduced Spanish-speaking anarchists to the Haymarket Affair years earlier – expressed profound shock at how workers’ lives in the United States hung precariously on the whims of the wealthy and powerful, thus undermining the republican ideals of equal justice. Campos had traveled around the United States, witnessing the contradiction. He had seen a great abundance of food and an equally great abundance of starving people. He saw previously independent people being forced to work for wages as the industrial revolution spread its tentacles from artisans’ shops in towns and cities to farms throughout the countryside. The great inventions that could make life better for the masses were being monopolized by the few so that they could grow ever richer. Great wealth from the government was being spent on weapons and a navy. Ultimately, in the United States – as everywhere in the world – the “government is nothing else but the arm that helps the bourgeoisie to subjugate the worker.” In such an environment, Campos asked, were workers under Spanish imperial and colonial rule that much worse off than their North American counterparts?¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid., June 13, 1894, 1–2. ¹⁸ Ibid., June 28, 1894, 4.

¹⁹ Ibid., March 18, 1897, 1–2; see also Susana Sueiro Seoane, “Prensa y redes anarquistas transnacionales: El olvidado papel de J.C. Campos y sus crónicas sobre los mártires de Chicago en el anarquismo de lengua hispana,” *Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea* 36 (2014): 259–295.

July Fourth – American Independence Day – was a favorite time to question the ideals and realities of the US political system. In summer 1895, *El Esclavo* published “El 4 de Julio.” An anonymous writer told a tale of how in the beginning of the American republic, all had looked good for the average man. However, in the past century, the nation’s leaders “had done nothing more than follow in the footsteps of the old European and Asian states.” Like those predecessors, the US republic was controlled by capital, worker exploitation increased daily, and free speech was for a select few and designed “to sustain bourgeois institutions.”²⁰ As a result, any politics celebrating the working-class electorate would always be a sham as long as a real social revolution remained unfulfilled.

Tampa’s anarchists continued this message in their analysis of the Socialist and Populist movements in the United States. Cerraí praised the idea of working people demanding to be heard. They symbolized for Cerraí “the first step toward revolution in the future.” Still, he remained skeptical about a Populist or Socialist movement that had as its crowning achievement electoral political power.²¹ Cerraí noted to his readers that both Socialists and anarchists “seek to abolish private property and government. The only real difference between one and the other is the methods that both employ to bring about social change” – Socialists choose to use government, which anarchists reject. What if Socialists could win elections? While a Socialist-led government would strive to implement its goals, there would remain a governmental structure. This would provide an avenue for the previous powerholders to block necessary reforms. Just as dangerous, it would create a system of power and control that could be too enticing for Socialist lawmakers to ever eliminate.²² Meanwhile, Populists fared poorly in the 1894 US congressional elections. In the wake of the elections, one anarchist writer suggested that part of this lackluster performance could be attributed to things like voter fraud. This raised a serious question about whether a candidate with a radical democratic agenda could ever be elected in the United States. If the Populists could be disenfranchised, then why not Socialists as well? As the writer concluded, it should be clear by now that revolution and not election was the only viable route.²³

Thus, any anarchist flirtations with democratic electoral politics were dashed by what anarchists in Florida witnessed firsthand. This would be an important lesson for anarchists after 1898, when the United States

²⁰ *El Esclavo*, July 9, 1895, 1.

²¹ *Ibid.*, July 31, 1894, 1.

²² *Ibid.*, August 22, 1894, 1–2.

²³ *Ibid.*, November 21, 1894, 4.

began to impose its political system in places like Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Panama. So, when moderate, bourgeois Cuban *independentistas* proposed a representative government for post-independence Cuba, one can understand why anarchists said no. Republican democracy was not the answer nor what workers wanted. The revolution must not be replaced by any government. After all, if the United States was the best example of republicanism – and anarchists saw how poorly that was working out for the laboring classes – then the Americans could keep it.

ANARCHISTS AND THE RUN-UP TO WAR IN CUBA

In January 1892, the Junta Central de Trabajadores de la Región Cubana (Central Junta of Workers from Cuba) issued the “Manifiesto del Congreso Obrero de 1892” (Manifiesto of the 1892 Labor Congress) that called for independence from Spain. Anarchists argued that for a social revolution to emerge on the island, Cuba first needed to break its colonial shackles. Anarchists in Cuba, Tampa, and beyond would no longer object to a “national liberation” movement; rather, collective freedom of a people was perfectly in line with the goal of social revolution and individual freedom.²⁴ Three-and-a-half months later, on May Day, *Hijos del Mundo* – the anarchist newspaper in Guanabacoa (across the bay from Havana) – printed a “Manifiesto á los trabajadores cubanos” (Manifiesto to Cuban Workers). Commemorating the Haymarket martyrs of Chicago, the authors listed governmental abuses in North America and Europe, turning specifically to Spanish Prime Minister Antonio Cánovas del Castillo: “And Cánovas, who longs to bathe himself in the blood of workers, who cowardly garrotes our *compañeros* from Jerez and incarcerates countless distinguished by their ideas for freedom,” should “be loathed with every energy in our souls for his profound wrongs.” The manifiesto called on workers to rise against the Spanish state: “Working people on their knees, we implore you to struggle for its [the revolution’s] immediate arrival. Workers: long live Anarchy!”²⁵

In an 1894 article titled “Lucharemos juntos” (We Will Fight Together), Cerraí praised the anarchists and separatists who “will struggle together”

²⁴ *El movimiento obrero cubano: documentos y artículos*, Vol. 1. (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1975), 81.

²⁵ “Manifiesto á los trabajadores,” *Hijos del Mundo* (Guanabacoa), May 1, 1892. Max Nettlau Collection. Regions and Countries. Central and South America. Other Countries. Cuba, 1892–1928, Folder 3404, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam; Poyo, “The Anarchist Challenge,” 41.

and be the key to a true independence for the island.²⁶ “Souvarine” urged Spanish workers to join the cause and to remember that even if not born in Cuba they could help those who were to free their homeland since everyone should have the right “to love the small corner where we have been born.”²⁷ By the last half of 1894, with the outbreak of war imminent, Tampa’s anarchists became more vitriolic and rancorous. For instance, the editors of *El Esclavo* published articles with titles like “They want war; they got it” and “Death to the bourgeoisie” that, among other things, described how to make dynamite and other useful explosive devices.²⁸

In the meantime, Cerraí attacked those who sought independence for Cuba but refused to accept the necessity for revolutionary social change to accompany the change in political status. Such people favor “the political revolution that will only provide emancipation from Spain without achieving any benefit that will better the sad condition of the workers.”²⁹ In an open letter to Cuban separatists in the United States, a columnist celebrated the approaching struggle. Yet, he warned freedom fighters who pick up a gun to gain their freedom to be careful, to know against whom they were fighting and why. Don’t just fight to free the island only to have a new set of the bourgeoisie take over. Be sure, he warned, to “cast aside ‘those men’ who want to enslave you in the factories of your ‘fellow countrymen.’”³⁰ Independence would be a launch pad for social revolution that would transform the island, not an end in itself that would substitute one bourgeois ruling elite for another and where “Cuban” workers would be exploited by “Cuban” owners.

Most anarchists in Cuba supported independence, viewing the conflict as an anticolonial struggle for freedom against Spanish imperial tyranny. Cuban anarchists joined José Martí’s Partido Revolucionario Cubano (Cuban Revolutionary Party, or PRC). They hoped to push the independence movement away from its bourgeois leadership based in New York City and, upon freeing the island from colonial rule, initiate a revolutionary transformation. They agitated among workers and even Spanish troops. One such agitator was José García, who traveled throughout eastern Cuba during the war, seeking to convert Spanish soldiers to the independence cause.³¹

²⁶ *El Esclavo*, September 5, 1894, 1–2. ²⁷ *Ibid.*, September 12, 1894, 2.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, September 26, 1894, 3–4. ²⁹ *Ibid.*, August 15, 1894, 1–2.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, November 7, 1894, 1.

³¹ Casanovas Codina, *Bread, or Bullets!*, 226; Shaffer, *Anarchism and Countercultural Politics*, 44.

Secundino Delgado, one of *El Esclavo*'s editors, provides a clear example of anarchist pro-independence support. Born in 1867, Delgado grew up on the Canary island of Tenerife. At fourteen, he joined other Canarians crossing the Atlantic to find work in Cuba's cigar factories. Some time later, he moved to Tampa, helped edit *El Esclavo*, threw his support behind the anticolonial struggle, and urged Canarian conscripts in the Spanish army to change sides. Delgado then left Tampa, traveling first to Key West and then Havana. Following a crackdown on Havana's anarchists in 1896, he fled Cuba, returning to the Canary Islands. Then, Delgado had to flee his homeland once again (this time heading to Venezuela) when Cuba's Captain General Valeriano Weyler accused him of being a Florida-based radical who orchestrated an assassination attempt. This native of the Canary Islands eventually returned and became one of the most well-known anarchist proponents of Canary national identity, and an outspoken anarchist supporter for the islands' independence from Spanish rule – a political cocktail he first tasted in Tampa during Cuba's independence war.³²

However, not all anarchists supported the Cuban rebellion. Some anarchists in Cuba and New York City urged anarchists to avoid becoming involved in what they saw as largely a bourgeois affair. War critics like Pedro Esteve (at least initially) and Cristóbal Fuente urged neutrality. Beyond fear of replacing one government with another, they suspected that any overt anarchist support for the Cuban cause could result in a new wave of repression against anarchists in Cuba and Spain. In addition, some anarchists in Cuba feared that if they openly aided the rebellion, then Spanish workers seeking to remain loyal to the homeland could attack them; likewise, if anarchists in Cuba opposed the rebellion, then they faced potential retribution from pro-independence Cuban workers. So, anarchist neutrality was best.³³

³² See these excellent analyses of Delgado: Enrique Galván-Álvarez, "Anarchism and the Anti-colonial Canarian Imagination: The Missing Flag," *History Workshop Journal* 83, no. 1 (April 2017): 253–271; Juan José Cruz, "You Can't Go Home, Yankee: Teaching U.S. History to Canary Islands Students," *The History Teacher* 35, no. 3 (2002): 343–372; Casanovas Codina, *Bread, or Bullets!*, 227.

³³ Casanovas Codina, *Bread, or Bullets!*, 223–226; Christopher J. Castañeda, "Times of Propaganda and Struggle: *El Despertar* and Brooklyn's Spanish Anarchists, 1890–1905," in *Radical Gotham: Anarchism in New York City from Schwab's Saloon to Occupy Wall Street*, ed. Tom Goyens (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 88; Zimmer, *Immigrants against the State*, 122.

To counter those radicals who questioned anarchist support for Cuba's independence struggle, *El Esclavo* published J. Raices's four-part article "La revolución social avanza" (The Social Revolution Advances). The last installment was published on February 6 – just days before the rebellion began. Raices concluded that workers had to fight for the revolution against Spain. Freedom for Cuba was morally correct and would lead to a new, just revolutionary society. By doing so, workers "can win from this a powerful moral influence that will give us at the same time all of the material force that we need in order to establish there [in Cuba] the true revolutionary socialism."³⁴

ANARCHISTS DURING THE WAR FOR INDEPENDENCE

Just weeks following the outbreak of war in February 1895, anarchists in the United States cast the anticolonial rebellion in Cuba in broad global and historical terms. *El Esclavo* published the front-page manifesto "¡Obreros de Cuba!" (Cuban Workers!): "The flag of independence that waves in the countryside is not just the flag of one determined party; it does not represent only the protest against Spanish domination of Cuba. Rather, it represents the virile protest of all tyrannized and exploited people who make a supreme effort to attain their freedom."³⁵ Palmiro de Lidia – then in exile in New York City – put Cuba in the historical context of great revolutionary movements. He praised the American and French Revolutions for "illuminating the intelligences and burning the sacred flame of rebellion in the breasts of oppressed peoples" by their propaganda. However, as freedom spread in the nineteenth century, Cuba remained subjugated. It was time for Cuba to rise to the level of freedom that the Americas had long symbolized to the Old World.³⁶

While focusing on the global importance of the war, anarchists also refocused attention on possible local conflicts in Tampa, where they regularly worried about possible divisions between Cuban and Spanish workers, fearing that either or both could lapse into a patriotic jingoism for or against the rebellion. For Cubans this could result in detesting all things Spanish, including potential working-class allies. For Spaniards in Tampa, this could mean falling back on some patriotic sense of nationalism as put forth by Madrid. Consequently, in the war's first year, Tampa's anarchists regularly encouraged workers of different nationalities to

³⁴ *El Esclavo*, February 6, 1895, 1–2. ³⁵ *Ibid.*, March 7, 1895, 1.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, August 21, 1895, 1–2.

support a working-class internationalist position. Based in Key West, Roque Morera reminded Spaniard and Cuban alike “that the Cuban people rarely talk of the Cuban republic and always of *Cuba libre* and independent Cuba.” Such terms were important because a free Cuba was to be a bastion of freedom for all, not just Cubans. In addition, the paper called on Iberian workers not to volunteer or allow themselves to be sent to Cuba.³⁷

Palmiro de Lidia also spoke directly to his fellow Spaniards while trying to humanize the war. While always a supporter of Cuban independence, he rejected how some separatist leaders painted the Spanish forces with broad strokes of savagery. He urged readers to remember that Spanish mothers – just like Cuban ones – cried and lamented their sons going off to Cuba “to defend the right of conquest.” The letter caused a stir among some separatists in Cuba. The Havana-based anarchist “Perseverante” thought that de Lidia was being too soft on Spain. As is true in warfare throughout time, each side found it useful to stereotype, debase, and dehumanize their opponents, as many Cuban separatists did in order to fight Spain. But such demonization countered the spirit of internationalism. De Lidia reminded readers that most Spanish soldiers sent to Cuba were merely poor men pressed into service to fulfill the visions of grandeur of some general, some priest, some royal.³⁸

In the end, violence was the order of the day. In December 1894, *El Esclavo* had praised the coming violent upheaval on the island and its implications: “Cuban workers, we are going to be the first to raise the red flag and show the entire world by example and soon it will be inclined to follow our lead.”³⁹ In August 1895, *El Esclavo* praised the level of the violence that the rebel forces were waging throughout the island. As rebels destroyed fields and factories alike, many in the bourgeoisie complained about the cost of the war to their bottom lines. Anarchists wore such complaints as badges of honor. “Hurray for dynamite! Let the spirit of destruction guide the revolutionaries’ paths,” proclaimed one columnist.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, anarchists joined the violence. They placed bombs throughout Havana, blowing up bridges and gas lines. The most celebrated bombing occurred in spring 1896. With the war entering its second year, Captain General Weyler arrived in Cuba to suppress the rebellion.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, May 1, 1895, 1–2; May 15, 1895, 1.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, September 4, 1895, 1; October 2, 1895, 1–2. ³⁹ *Ibid.*, December 19, 1894, 1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, August 28, 1895, 1–2.

Planned in Florida with poor-quality dynamite, anarchists bombed the Palace of the Captains-General and destroyed the latrines – which actually was the target since the idea was to blow up the toilet when Weyler came to move his bowels. But, with his hemorrhoids, he rarely used the john and instead kept a chamber pot nearby.⁴¹ In Tampa, though, anarchists celebrated the bombing for its symbolic importance as the paper urged people to produce “similar explosions!”⁴² They also urged anarchists on the island to increase violence against Spanish targets in order “to teach the people who their true enemies were: the clergy, the bourgeoisie, and the military that sustains them.”⁴³

The violence got Weyler’s attention, and the ramifications were immense. Weyler attacked Havana’s labor organizations and banned the *lectores*. In October, the government began arresting radicals and closed *El Productor*. Weyler had help, and some of that help apparently came from a handful of Havana anarchists who continued to reject the idea of Cuban independence. One victim of this anarchist-on-anarchist intrigue was the prominent writer and spokesperson Manuel María Miranda. As Miranda told readers after the war, that October several tobacco workers “who had declared themselves anarchists since 1885, converted themselves into ferocious reactionary oppressors who applauded and congratulated that executioner of the Cuban people, General Weyler, for his cruel extermination policy.” These anarchists began collecting money in the factories to support Spanish troops against the rebels. Miranda and other anarchists who worked at the Don Quijote de la Mancha factory rose up, spoke out, and protested the fundraising campaign. Some weeks later, Miranda learned that officials wanted to talk to him. Fearing the worst, he fled into hiding in Guanabacoa with plans of joining a wave of independence supporters streaming to Mexico. An unemployed *lector* took a job with the secret police and tracked down Miranda. He convinced Miranda to travel to Regla and board a banana boat sailing to the United States. Once in Regla, though, the police sprang their trap, arrested Miranda, and took him to Havana.⁴⁴ At the end of November, authorities charged him with being an anarchist and deported him to Spain’s African prison colony on Fernando Póo.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Casanovas Codina, *Bread, or Bullets!*, 227. See also Frank Fernández’s colorful description in *La Sangre de Santa Águeda: Angiolillo, Betances, and Cánovas* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1994), 22.

⁴² *El Esclavo*, May 19, 1896, 3. ⁴³ *Ibid.*, July 8, 1896, 3–4.

⁴⁴ *El Nuevo Ideal*, January 5, 1900, 4; Muller, *Cuban Emigrés*, 37.

⁴⁵ *El Nuevo Ideal*, January 12, 1900, 4.

The crackdown also shaped the workers' movement in Puerto Rico. Santiago Iglesias Pantín lived in Havana from 1888 to 1896. He worked with Havana's *El Productor* and the anarchist-led Workers Circle as its secretary just as the Circle solidified its support for independence. In December 1896, authorities raided his Havana home, confiscated his books and documents, and issued an arrest warrant. Fearing for his safety, he boarded a ship bound for London. But first the ship stopped in San Juan, Puerto Rico, where Iglesias Pantín disembarked and in early 1897 began a life of labor activism on that island.⁴⁶

The war also had broad global support, with international anarchists pledging to come and fight. For instance, Argentinean and Spanish anarchists supported the war. Some Argentineans supposedly were preparing to embark for Cuba, while Spanish anarchists were volunteering for Cuban duty to spread propaganda among the soldiers.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, real-life internationalism was at work in the polyglot enclave of Tampa. Reflecting the large Italian anarchist support for the war, a few Italians joined armed expeditions with their Spanish-speaking comrades as they crossed the Straits to fight. Most expeditions arrived in western Cuba, especially the important tobacco-growing area around Pinar del Río. It was there that in late May 1897 a pair of Italian anarchists – Guglielmo Petriccione and Orestes Ferrara – arrived with arms and men.⁴⁸

By February 1896, fully a year into the war, there were at least five separate anarchist groups operating in Tampa and West Tampa. These groups, with names like La Alianza (The Alliance), El Hambre (The Hungry), El Despertar (The Awakening), Vigilante, and Sociedad de Propaganda Obrera (Society of Worker Propaganda), raised funds to launch more expeditions, send supplies to the front lines, and support families left behind in Cuba after anarchist husbands were deported.⁴⁹ Yet, the ability to raise money became a problem. The spreading

⁴⁶ Santiago Iglesias Pantín, *Luchas emancipadoras (Crónicas de Puerto Rico)*, Vol. I (San Juan: Imprenta Venezuela, 1929/1958), 17–19, 31–33; Igualdad Iglesias de Pagán, *El obrerismo en Puerto Rico: Época de Santiago Iglesias (1896–1905)* (Palencia de Castilla: Ediciones Juan Ponce de León, 1973), 22.

⁴⁷ *El Esclavo*, October 28, 1895, 4.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, June 5, 1897, 4; Anderson, *Under Three Flags*, 190. See Chapters 3 and 7 in this book on the deradicalization of Ferrara from 1900 to the 1920s. *La Questione Sociale* in Paterson, New Jersey supported the war and anarchist Harry Kelly saw five Italian anarchists in Florida heading to Cuba. See Zimmer, *Immigrants against the State*, 121–122.

⁴⁹ Casanovas Codina, *Bread, or Bullets!*, 205–206, 227; *El Esclavo*, January 22, 1896, 1 and 4; February 20, 1896, 4; January 13, 1897, 2; February 24, 1897, 4.

conflagration on the island disrupted the key economic engine of Florida and Cuba: tobacco. Scorched earth policies waged by both sides laid to waste vast tobacco fields. As a result, less leaf arrived in Florida factories, and demand for workers slowed. Since anarchists relied on workers' contributions to support their activities and to aid in the war effort, the spreading of the conflict meant less money available to finance the rebellion. Plus, as people fled the conflict, they often found themselves in Florida looking for work, meaning that just when there was less work available, more workers were looking for jobs and driving down wages. So, although anarchists earlier had praised the violent destruction of the Cuban economy as a legitimate tactic in the war effort, they soon faced unforeseen consequences of that celebrated strategy.

Yet, in response to the war, decreased exports of tobacco leaf from the island to Florida factories, and increased intimidation from Florida factory owners, workers rose up rather than cowered. The effects of the war helped to inspire a growing sense of working-class consciousness. One writer warned the factory owners that they ought to be cautious about carrying their exploitations to the extreme because "modern ideas and the Cuban war have taught the workers to have *less respect for property* and to successfully master the torch and dynamite."⁵⁰ This actually encouraged anarchist agitation as workers continued their long tradition of clearing a factory with the simple cry of "*¡Para las calles!*" (To the streets!).⁵¹

As a result, labor actions surged throughout Tampa in 1895 and 1896. Several strikes emerged as economic pressures on workers increased. In September 1896, for instance, workers at the González Mora workshop struck to protest wage cuts. One anarchist considered the strike as a spark to increase worker consciousness, merging the labor strike with the imagery of the war: "To the struggle, then! To combat! And let the chips fall where they may!" By October, workers had gone on strike at other tobacco factories, including Los Cabezones and Ortiz. By winning those strikes, they were energized to go after more factories, including the most prominent: the Martínez Ybor factory itself. By December 1896, workers had won that strike too. In fact, strike activities in the last third of 1896 so embroiled Tampa's working class that *El Esclavo* abandoned almost all its coverage of the 1896 US presidential elections and the war in Cuba.⁵²

⁵⁰ *El Esclavo*, June 24, 1896, 1. Italics in original.

⁵¹ Mormino and Pozzetta, "Spanish Anarchism in Tampa," 188.

⁵² *El Esclavo*, September 23, 1896, 1; October 7, 1896, 1; December 2, 1896, 1.

Anarchists on both sides of the Florida Straits were largely responsible for bringing workers to the separatist cause. There was no larger symbol of the separatist cause overall than José Martí. While Martí was known for advocating social reforms for a post-independence Cuba, one must wonder if the anarchists actually believed him. In nearly four years of publishing a weekly newspaper, Tampa's anarchists paid almost no attention to Martí and his copious writings. In the heady first year of its publication, in fact, not once did *El Esclavo* mention Martí, though they did make a couple of references to fellow independence leader Antonio Maceo.

While it was one thing to ignore Martí, just as odd was the paper's lack of focus on the US government and growing cries by some in the United States to take a stand against Spain in the war. Only once – in early 1897 – did US government actions draw the editors' attention. In 1896 the US Congress passed a resolution supporting Cuban independence, but President Cleveland did not act on the resolution, as a way of avoiding war with Spain. The incoming McKinley administration feared that the rebellion, now two years old, was destroying the Cuban economy and harming US investments. To the Tampa anarchists, any US governmental or military action would be self-serving and run against the interests of a free people on the island. "If the North American Senate and Congress advocate recognizing Cuban independence," they argued, "it is not for the affection and friendship that they have for the Cubans but because the capital investments they have there are in danger, and they hope that with an independent Cuba they will gain commercial monopolies that today they lack."⁵³

Meanwhile, the US government generally turned a blind eye to the Tampa anarchists during the war. Anarchists were not arrested for their political activities regarding Cuba and there appears to have been no efforts by the US government to prevent anarchists from sending aid, supplies, and fighters from the Florida coast to the island. In addition, for most of its run, *El Esclavo* avoided censorship or suppression. However, that changed as anarchists stepped up their violence in Spain. During 1897, Spanish officials intensified their crackdown on anarchists in Cuba and Spain. Out of the mix emerged the very non-anarchist Puerto Rican Ramón Emeterio Betances. In 1871, Betances had moved to France – arriving just eight months after the fall of the Paris Commune. Many of

⁵³ Ibid., February 24, 1897, 2–3.

his friends over the years were anarchists and former *communards* like Élisée Reclus, Louise Michel, and Charles Malato. By 1896, Betances was such a recognized supporter of Cuban independence that he became the chief diplomat for the Cuban independence cause in Paris. In 1897, Betances met the Italian anarchist Michele Angiolillo and the two spoke of exacting revenge on the Spanish monarchy. While Betances hated Prime Minister Cánovas del Castillo for allowing Weyler carte blanche to butcher Cubans, Angiolillo equally hated the Spanish prime minister for authorizing the execution of anarchists at the Barcelona prison of Montjuïc. That summer, Angiolillo traveled to the resort of Santa Águeda, where Cánovas del Castillo was vacationing. As the prime minister rested outside the hotel, Angiolillo walked up to him and fired three bullets into the Spanish leader.⁵⁴

Anarchists around the world celebrated the assassination of the man who had presided over massive atrocities committed by his forces in Spain and Cuba. In September, *El Esclavo* published two front-page columns praising Angiolillo's actions. One column concluded: "It was about time." In the other column, J. C. Campos likewise praised the assassination but lamented that in the name of the cause a hero like Angiolillo had to be sacrificed when Spanish officials arrested and then executed him.⁵⁵ But not all was good news for the anarchists. US authorities were appalled by anarchist praise of assassination and closed *El Esclavo*. The newspaper reemerged in February 1898 and published for only one more month. In that final issue, the editors sold portraits of Angiolillo for ten cents each as a fundraiser. US officials ordered the paper closed again. Both times the US government shut down the paper because it publicly celebrated assassinating a world leader.⁵⁶ And for someone like Manuel Miranda, stranded in a Spanish detention facility in Fernando Póo, the joy of Angiolillo's actions was tempered when the governor of the island refused to put Miranda's name on a general amnesty list of political prisoners because, as Miranda put it, "on my police record I was identified as an anarchist, and because the author of Cánovas del Castillo's death was also an anarchist . . ." He did not need to complete the thought – guilt by ideological association.⁵⁷ Miranda would not go home until the war's end.

⁵⁴ Anderson, *Under Three Flags*, 184–194; Richard Bach Jensen, *The Battle against Anarchist Terrorism: An International History, 1878–1934* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 38; Fernández, *La sangre de Santa Águeda*, 16.

⁵⁵ *El Esclavo*, September 24, 1897, 1. ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, February 11, 1898; March 23, 1898.

⁵⁷ Miranda, *Memorias de un deportado*, 48.

CONCLUSION

In April 1898, the United States declared war on Spain and invaded Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. Anarchists feared entrance of the United States into the war. As Kenyon Zimmer writes, US entry “placed anarchist backers of Cuban independence in an untenable position, as they could not in good conscience support the openly imperialist motives of the United States.”⁵⁸ By the end of the year, Spain had surrendered to Washington and the United States began a four-year military occupation of the island. Any anticipated postwar anarchist social revolution was crushed.

In 1899, with the war over, anarchists brought Enrique Creci’s remains to Havana for reburial. When his body arrived in Havana, men and women gathered at the Workers Center for commemorative and propaganda speeches, but the police broke up the event. In defiance, the crowd regathered and silently marched Creci’s coffin to the cemetery, led by the editorial staff of Cuba’s first post Spanish-era anarchist newspaper *El Nuevo Ideal*. In Guanabacoa, Jaime Mayol Martínez published his poem “Enrique Creci,” addressing the anarchist: “you left behind a luminous footprint / like that of the sublime martyr of Judea.”⁵⁹ As anarchists would come to see it, the war had been lost – no social revolution would emerge in Cuba – but those who sacrificed themselves and their efforts on both sides of the Florida Straits would be remembered for showing the path forward and for dying the martyr’s death.

But if the war had been lost, a new regional anarchist network had been forged. The years preceding Spain’s defeat in 1898 witnessed the emergence of two prominent and influential anarchist movements on opposite sides of the Straits – one in Havana and another mainly in Tampa. Both cities’ movements were co-dependent on income, media, propaganda, and recruits. Before 1898, both Tampa and Havana had thriving anarchist presses that fed off one another. During the war, as state repression in Cuba surged, Tampa’s anarchists became even more vital. After the US invasion in 1898, and as US military and economic interests spread throughout Cuba in the following years, anarchists would expand this network across the island.

The war was instrumental for the development of labor and anarchist politics in Puerto Rico and Panama too. Puerto Rico was Spain’s other

⁵⁸ Zimmer, *Immigrants against the State*, 122.

⁵⁹ Jaime Mayol Martínez, “Enrique Creci,” *Vibraciones* (Guanabacoa, Cuba, 1899), n.p.; *Risveglio*, June 1913, 2–3.

sole colony in the Western Hemisphere by 1895. While some Puerto Ricans sought political independence or autonomy, the political atmosphere on the island was very different than in Cuba. There was no armed independence movement and organized labor with a radical consciousness was embryonic at best, with only a smattering of anarchist activists. But from this environment emerged an anarchist escapee from the Cuban war and Spanish repression on the island. When he fled Cuba and landed in Puerto Rico, Santiago Iglesias Pantín brought with him some serious anarchist credentials. While he would soon abandon anarchism, his arrival in San Juan not only gave anarchists and other labor radicals there a needed jolt, but also created the initial link between Puerto Rico and the growing anarchist network.

Cuba's war for independence also illustrated to US foreign policy experts specifically and expansionists in general that they needed a canal through Central America in order to expedite military transit, as well as trade, between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. Political intrigue resulted in creation of the independent Republic of Panama in November 1903. From 1904 to 1914, the United States oversaw and financed one of the world's great engineering feats by building the Panama Canal through the heart of the new republic. Of course, it was the tens of thousands of workers from Spain, Italy, and the West Indies who mostly built the canal. And among these workers were the first anarchists to organize in Panama, anarchists who would develop the western link of the Caribbean network – and all because Washington wanted a canal as a result of the Cuban war.

The war did more than launch US and anarchist expansion around the region. The war, and anarchist experiences in Florida especially, left lasting impressions on activists who were intent on creating anarchy in the Caribbean. Anarchists learned the importance of multiethnic organizing with cooperation between Cubans, Spaniards, Italians, and more. Anarchists also learned that representative democracy was little, if any, better than other forms of government, and as Washington came to spread democratic political institutions to Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Panama, anarchists were there with ample critiques learned firsthand in Florida. Finally, anarchists came to understand the dangers of supporting nationalist independence struggles. Here, it is worth considering that those anarchists who were skeptical of the war might have been correct. It sounds weak and lacking in a certain order of courage, but many had a valid concern. It was only reasonable that a post-independence capitalist class would want a government that passed laws

to preserve bourgeois property. Anarchist war critics had every reason to believe that the bourgeoisie and wealthy would renege on promised social reforms and land redistribution for the thousands of working-class and peasant soldiers fighting for independence. After all, when did anarchists take the bourgeoisie at their word anyway? Though anti-war anarchists lacked crystal balls and were in the anarchist minority by not supporting the war, ultimately they would be proven right in terms of what followed the war and why supporting political independence struggles was fraught with danger.