Gerald E. Poyo

Exile and Revolution: José D. Poyo, Key West, and Cuban Independence. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014. xiii + 302 pp. (Cloth US\$74.95)

For thirty-five years, Gerald E. Poyo has excavated and analyzed histories of Cuban exile communities in the United States in the nineteenth century. He has traced their formation and the shifting dynamics among exiles with distinct visions: autonomists, annexationists, nationalists, liberal elites, radical tobacco workers, exhausted refugees, labor organizers, anarchists, advocates of independence, revolutionary theorists, politicized bandits, and military leaders. *Exile and Revolution* brings his wealth of knowledge—augmented by newly-discovered Spanish sources—to the life of José Dolores Poyo (1836–1911), his great-great-grandfather and a leading advocate of *Cuba Libre*. This beautifully crafted study captures Poyo's passionate commitment to Cuban independence, his extraordinary skills as a community organizer and editor in Key West, and his complex entanglements with Máximo Gómez, José Martí, and other nationalist leaders. The book demonstrates the central role that Key West played in that long and tortuous struggle.

While the book focuses on José Poyo's varied and extended political activities, it also reveals his devotion to his wife Clara and their four children, all of whom worked to advance the independence movement. Arriving in Key West in 1869, Poyo forged close bonds with like-minded nationalists in the city, including cigar workers, manufacturers, and shopkeepers. He disseminated news from Cuba, Spain, and other exile communities as a *lector* in local cigar factories and through *El Yara*, the newspaper he edited for twenty years. But Gerald Poyo does not present a romanticized portrait of this remarkable leader. He notes “a certain authoritarian manner, stubbornness, and inflexibility” that underlay his forefather's “persistence and resilience” (p. 7)—characteristics that allowed José Poyo to sustain his nationalist vision amid economic depressions, military failures, and ideological battles. Over three decades, he and his colleagues not only had to inspire other exiles to support independence but also to fend off efforts by liberal countrymen to accept autonomy within the Spanish Empire and efforts by the United States to annex the island colony.

A rich scholarship already exists on Cuban history and economy, as well as exile communities in the United States and the class, race, and gender dynamics within Cuba and among exiles. But too often works on Cuba serve only as background in studies of exile communities, and rarely do studies of Cuba consider exile communities central to their analysis. *Exile and Revolution* offers a distinct perspective by illuminating the complex connections among the various nations, institutions, and individuals engaged in the struggle for

Cuba Libre by illustrating the entangled histories of Spanish colonialism, Cuban independence, and U.S. imperialism through the story of one man and one community. Gerald Poyo offers finely-honed and broadly significant arguments about both Cuban revolutionary activism and revolutionary activism more generally.

José Poyo was a practical revolutionary, who used his deep knowledge of Spanish and Cuban history, his identity as a Freemason, and his skills as an orator, editor, and organizer to inspire exiles, raise funds, develop patriotic clubs and governing councils, and prepare armed expeditions. But his efforts were constantly shaped by events beyond his control. Economic depressions in the early 1870s and 1890s, yellow fever epidemics, and a massive fire in Key West seriously disrupted nationalist organizing. Moreover, the fire in tandem with widespread cigar strikes led several manufacturers and thousands of workers to build a new exile community in Tampa, which drained resources from Key West even as it provided another center of radical organizing. In addition, Spanish policies constantly changed the Cuban political landscape, with more liberal administrations giving hope to autonomists and more repressive regimes fueling nationalist efforts even as they devastated their leadership. U.S. policies had equally significant effects. In the 1890s, for example, the U.S. government refused to recognize the belligerent status of Cuban revolutionaries, creating havoc with exiles' efforts to send arms and soldiers to Cuba. The difficulties posed by outside forces were complicated further by divisions within the exile community over strategies, goals, and timing. Gerald Poyo carefully documents these twists and turns while showing that José Poyo maintained his focus on Cuban independence and his belief in armed struggle. He worked closely with local *patriotas* as well as generals like Máximo Gómez and, in the early 1890s, with José Martí to launch the final revolutionary uprising.

Still, decades of organizing could not ensure Cuban independence. The return of José Poyo and his family to Havana led to his bitter disappointment in both the U.S. government and many of his former revolutionary colleagues. But the inveterate *independenista* found purpose in the last decade of his life by working at the Cuban National Archive and in other ways preserving the legacy of José Martí and other *patriotas*. With *Exile and Revolution*, José Poyo and the Key West community will now get the recognition they deserve as well.

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