

COSSIO Y CISNEROS, EVANGELINA (1879–)

The face that in all probability shifted American sympathy toward the Cuban cause was that of a beautiful young woman, the eighteen year old, Evangelina Cossio y Cisneros. Accused of conspiracy in Cuba, Cossio y Cisneros was imprisoned in Havana's Casa de Recogidas awaiting a transfer to a Spanish prison in Ceuta. Her story, dramatically embellished to corner the market on New York City newspaper sales, formed banner headlines across the pages of William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal*, and swayed public opinion in favor of U.S. military intervention into the Cuban-Spanish War. The *New York Journal* initiated a campaign to free the "delicate and innocent girl." Following a daring jailbreak covered by the Journal and engineered by Karl Decker, a Hearst reporter, in concert with U.S. Consulate authorities and Cuban independentistas in Havana on October 7, 1897, she lay hidden for two days in the private home of Carlos Carbonell, the man she would ultimately marry. Smuggled on board the ship, the Seneca, disguised as a young boy smoking an unlit cigar, she was greeted upon disembarking in New York City by throngs of well-wishers; bells, whistles and the kind of fanfare reserved for visiting celebrities. She was honored at a reception in Madison Square Garden, and received by the president in the White House.

A tour of the South Florida communities resulted in similar pandemonium and in tribute to Evangelina, dozens of newly organized clubs sprouted in her name. Her innocent demeanor notwithstanding, Cossio y Cisneros was indeed guilty of treason, and had deliberately baited a Spanish official into her home for the purposes of taking him prisoner. She had not suffered the atrocities reported in the press but no one paid attention to the truth. Her celebrity was used by both sides to further political means. After a short stay in Maryland she became the wife of Carlos Carbonell, and the couple lived in the United States for several years before returning to Cuba where she lived the rest of her life.