

## José Martí, 1853 - 1895

He is Cuba's national hero. Cubans know Martí as "The Apostle." Born in Havana in 1853, he went to jail at age 16 for writings sympathetic to rebels fighting the Spanish in Cuba's First War for Independence. Deported to Spain where he studied law and wrote a book on his imprisonment, Martí soon began a life of wandering, moving from Spain, to the United States (briefly), Mexico, Guatemala, and Venezuela. He stopped in Cuba, only to be expelled. Along the way he taught, contributed to periodicals, and learned. Martí lived in the United States from

1880 to 1895 when he left for Cuba as the civilian leader of revolutionary forces fighting in Cuba's Second War for Independence.



In the United States Martí served as consul for Uruguay, Argentina, and Paraguay and was a correspondent for Latin American newspapers. He also wrote a novel, books of poems, and a magazine for children. Beginning as a volunteer teacher for poor Cuban immigrants in New York City, Martí established connections among Cuban exiles throughout eastern United States. His organizing and political education work among them thrust him into the prime leadership position of the Cuban Revolutionary Party, which he founded in 1892, along with the Party's "Patria" newspaper. By that time Martí was recruiting, indoctrinating, and coordinating Cubans who would pay for, fight in, and lead in the upcoming revolutionary war. To do so, Martí spent time in southeastern U.S. cities -- especially in Florida -- also in Costa Rica, Panama, Jamaica, and Mexico. He died in battle in eastern Cuba on May 19, 1895. Martí was 42 years old.

*Here are some quotations:*

- "With a single voice the hymn is already being sung; the present generation is carrying hardworking America along the road enriched by their sublime fathers from [the] Rio Grande to the Straits of Magellan, the Great Semi, astride its condor, spreading the seed of the new America over the romantic nations of the continent and the sorrowful

islands of the sea.” - (From Martí's essay “Our America,” 1891)

- “With the poor people of the world/ I want to cast my lot. / The stream from the mountains/ Pleases me more than the sea.” (From “Simple Verses,” 1891)
- “ ‘Racist’ is a confusing word, and it should be clarified. Men have no special rights simply because they belong to one race or another. When you say ‘men,’ you have already imbued them with all their rights. (...)To insist on racial divisions, on racial differences, in an already divided people, is to place obstacles in the way of public and individual happiness, which can only be obtained by bringing people together as a nation.” (From “My Race,” published in *Patria*, April 16, 1893)
- “Cubans: For suffering Cuba, the first word. Cuba must be considered an altar for the offering of our lives, not a pedestal for lifting us above it (...) And let us place around the star of our new flag this formula of love triumphant: ‘With all, and for the good of all.’”- (beginning and end of Martí's speech in Tampa November 26, 1891)
- “I have lived in the monster and I know its entrails ... The Cuban war ... has come to America in time to prevent Cuba's annexation to the United States.” (From Martí's letter to Manuel Mercado, written the day before Martí died in battle)

*On July 26, 1953, 100 years after José Martí's birth, Cuban revolutionaries led by Fidel Castro staged an assault on the Moncada barracks in Santiago de Cuba. This was their first step toward overthrowing the U.S.-supported Fulgencio Batista dictatorship. The assault failed and dozens of rebels were killed. At his trial in Santiago on October 16, 1953, Fidel Castro defended himself in an oration lasting five hours. Published afterwards as “History Will Absolve Me,” Castro's defense became a rallying cry for the revolutionary movement. Castro finished his speech by quoting José Martí and then by honoring Martí's legacy, as follows:*

According to Martí: “The man who abides by unjust laws and permits any man to trample and mistreat the country in which he was born is not an honorable man ... In the world there must be a certain degree of honor just as there must be a certain amount of light. When there are many men without honor, there are always others who bear in themselves the honor of many men. These are the men who rebel with great force against those who steal the people's freedom, that is to say, against those who steal honor itself. In those men thousands more are contained, an entire people is contained, human dignity is contained ...”

Fidel Castro then declared, “It seemed that the Apostle would die during his Centennial. It seemed that his memory would be extinguished forever. So great was the affront! But he is alive; he has not died. His people are rebellious. His people are worthy. His people are faithful to his memory. There are Cubans who have fallen defending his doctrines. There are young men who in magnificent selflessness came to die beside his tomb, giving their blood and their lives so that he could keep on living in the heart of his nation. Cuba, what would have become of you had you let your Apostle die?”