

Who Stands Up for Cuba Today Stands Up for All Time

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Translator's note: *Cuba's revolution led by José Martí sought independence from Spain and from the United States. For Andrés Gómez, Martí's words shed light on the ideological origins of Cuba's claim to be a force for good in today's world. Martí, who died in battle in 1895, looked toward a future Cuba where social justice would prevail. Cuba would be in solidarity with other peoples, in Latin America and elsewhere. Cuba would be a teacher for the world.*

The English translations of the excerpts below, one written in 1891 and two others written in 1895, are taken from "José Martí, Our America," Philip S. Foner, ed., (Monthly Review Press, 1977).

Only a handful of peoples in history have been able to succeed, to the extent Cuba has, in developing, consolidating, and deepening a revolutionary process. Cuba's revolution assured national sovereignty and fundamental liberties. The essential object was to enable a society built on solidarity to become ever more just.

This ongoing process of liberation goes back to the middle of the 19th century. There have been errors, reverses, and defeats. The process has been arduous and has necessitated selfless sacrifice by generations of the homeland's best sons and daughters. It has demanded steadfast patriotic and revolutionary unity from millions of Cubans.

Once more we approach the date of February 24, when in 1895 – That was 111 years ago — Cubans launched their last war for independence from Spain. Conditions prevailing in the country at the time, fallout from a despicable colonial system, indicated the war would be a big one. José Martí, the principal leader of that project, was aware, like no one else, of the opportunity that existed for not only obtaining national independence but also for establishing a new and just republic and, more, one that would be conscious of its responsibilities to the rest of humankind.

For the Apostle, [as Cubans refer to Martí], challenges presented by U.S. imperialism were of primordial importance, just as continues to be the case for us today. That's why, in order to commemorate and celebrate this grand anniversary of the homeland I want to cite a few sections of his writings where he warns us of the empire's designs and of their consequences for Cuba and for the rest of our fraternal peoples. They are timely and serve as warnings for today.

In November, in 1889 on the occasion of the International Congress convoked by the North American government in Washington, Martí wrote:

“There’s never been in America, since U.S. independence, an issue that requires more good sense; or demands more vigilance; or calls for a clearer, more meticulous study than the invitation that the powerful United States, overfilled with unsold products and determined to extend its dominions in America, has extended to weaker American nations. Linked by free and useful trade with European peoples, those nations were now being asked to establish an anti-European league. As a result, their dealings with the rest of the world would be cut off. Spanish America knew how to save itself from Spanish tyranny. Now looking critically at the antecedents, causes, and implications of this invitation, I say urgently — because it’s the truth — that the time has come for Spanish America to declare its second independence. (...) That accessible human liberty that bursts out among peoples never originated from North America, not even in the generous carelessness of its youth. Our liberty passes through snow-covered mountains to rescue people who are brothers.” [*The reference is to the Liberator Simon Bolivar’s military expeditions that moved south across the Andes.*]

In 1895, on the eve of the “necessary war,” (*Martí’s term*), and on the occasion of the third anniversary of the founding of the Cuban Revolutionary Party, Martí wrote [in *Patria*, the Party’s newspaper, an article entitled:] “The Soul of the Revolution, Cuba’s Duty in America.” Excerpts follow:

“Not with a light hand but with a consciousness developed over the centuries one must restore new life to the liberated Antilles. This great human responsibility should be undertaken with awesome respect. A person reaches tremendous heights through nobility of purpose, or falls to abysmal depths because of failing to understand. It is a world we are holding in balance, not merely a couple of islands we are about to free. (...) A mistake in Cuba is a mistake in America, a mistake in present-day humanity. Whoever rebels for Cuba today is in revolt for all time. Since Cuba is our sacred homeland, it requires special thought; serving Cuba, in so glorious and difficult a time, fills a man with dignity and nobility. This worthy obligation fortifies us with strength of heart, guides us like a perennial star, and will shine from our graves like a light of eternal warning.”

The translator adds this from the same article by Martí: “The Antilles lies astride the pivot of America; if enslaved, they would be nothing but a pontoon bridge for an imperialist republic’s war against the suspicious and superior world already preparing to deny it power (...) The United States will find more certain greatness in the development of its own land, unfortunately feudal and divided into two hostile parts, than in the ignoble conquest of its lesser neighbors.”

In January 1891 Martí wrote in his essay *Our America* the following: “What remains of the village in America must arouse itself. These are not the times for sleeping in a nightcap but with weapons for a pillow (...) We can no longer be a people of leaves living in the air, our foliage heavy with blooms and crackling or

humming at the whim of the sun's caress, or buffered and tossed by the storm. The trees must form ranks to keep the giant with seven-league boots from passing! It is the time of mobilization, of marching together, and we must go forward in close order, like silver in the veins of the Andes. Only those born prematurely are lacking in courage. Those without faith in their country are seven-month weaklings. Because they have no courage, they deny it to others. Their puny arms – arms with bracelets and hands with painted nails, arms of Paris or Madrid – can hardly reach the bottom limb, and they say the tall tree is never to be climbed. The ships should be loaded with those harmful insects that gnaw at the bone of the country that nourishes them.”

And finally I quote from the “Manifesto of Montecristi,” [which Martí and General Máximo Gómez] prepared in March 1895 [in the Dominican Republic] on their way to the homeland. It explains the just cause of the war begun on the island a month earlier:

“The revolution for independence, begun at Yara after glorious and bloody preparations, has led Cuba into another period of war. This is the result of agreements reached by the Revolutionary Party abroad and on the island, and through its command, and through exemplary brotherhood within the Party of all elements dedicated to the country's emancipation and security — for the good of America and the world. The elected representatives of the revolution — which today is confirmed — do recognize and respect their duty to report to the country its precise objectives — without usurping the declarations and the tone exclusive to the dignity of the established republic. The revolution must not cause unjustified bloodshed in Cuba, nor lack a just hope of triumph, for it is born of justice and is alien to vengeance, and its objectives define the unquenchable war which today brings into struggle all elements of Cuban society, who are part of a wise and stirring democracy. (...) Today we reverently proclaim from the threshold of the world the spirit and doctrines which caused and are inspiring the total and humanitarian war during the course of which the Cuban people, unconquerable and indivisible, are going to be even further united. Today let us, as leaders and guideposts of our nation, lawfully invoke the magnificent founders whose labors are invigorating the grateful country (...) Upon thus declaring in the name of our country, and attesting before it and before its free power of constitution, the identical work of two generations – the Delegate of the Cuban Revolutionary Party, created to organize and aid the present war, and the Commander-in-Chief, elected to that post by all active members of the Army of Liberation, by virtue of the common responsibility of their representation, and as an indication of the unity and solidarity of the Cuban revolution, together do endorse this declaration.”