José Martí

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José Julián Martí Pérez

**Born**

January 28, 1853

Havana, Cuba

**Died**

May 19, 1895 (aged 42)

Cauto, Cuba

**Occupation**

poet, writer, nationalist leader

**Nationality**

Cuban

**Literary movement**

Modernismo

**Spouse(s)**

Carmen Zayas Bazan

**Children**

José Francisco "Pepito" Martí
José Julián Martí Pérez (January 28, 1853 – May 19, 1895) was a Cuban national hero and an important figure in Latin American literature. In his short life he was a poet, an essayist, a journalist, a revolutionary philosopher, a translator, a professor, a publisher, and a political theorist. He was also a part of the Cuban Freemasons. Through his writings and political activity, he became a symbol for Cuba's bid for independence against Spain in the 19th century, and is referred to as the "Apostle of Cuban Independence."[1] He also fought against the threat of United States expansionism into Cuba. From adolescence, he dedicated his life to the promotion of liberty, political independence for Cuba and intellectual independence for all Spanish Americans; his death was used as a cry for Cuban independence from Spain by both the Cuban revolutionaries and those Cubans previously reluctant to start a revolt.

Born in Havana, Martí began his political activism at an early age. He would travel extensively in Spain, Latin America, and the United States raising awareness and support for the cause of Cuban independence. His unification of the Cuban émigré community, particularly in Florida, was crucial to the success of the Cuban War of Independence against Spain. He was a key figure in the planning and execution of this war, as well as the designer of the Cuban Revolutionary Party and its ideology. He died in military action on May 19, 1895.

Martí is considered one of the great turn-of-the-century Latin American intellectuals. His written works consist of a series of poems, essays, letters, lectures, a novel, and even a children's magazine. After his death, one of his poems from the book, "Versos Sencillos" (Simple Verses) was adapted to the song, "Guantanamera", which has become the definitive patriotic song of Cuba.

The concepts of freedom, liberty, and democracy are prominent themes in all of his works, which were influential on the Nicaraguan poet, Rubén Darío and the Chilean poet, Gabriela Mistral.[2]

Life

Early life: Cuba 1853-1870

José Julián Martí Pérez was born on January 28, 1853, in Havana, at 41 Paula St., to a Spanish Valencian father, Mariano Martí Navarro, and Leonor Pérez Cabrera, a native of the Canary Islands. Martí was the elder brother to seven sisters: Leonor, Mariana, Maria de Carmen, María de Pilar, Rita Amelia, Antonia and Dolores. He was baptized on February 12 in Santo Ángel Custodio church. When he was four, his family moved from Cuba to Valencia, Spain, but two years later they returned to the island where
they enrolled José at a local public school, in the Santa Clara neighborhood where his father worked as a prison guard.[3]

In 1865, he enrolled in the Escuela de Instrucción Primaria Superior Municipal Instrumental in his development of a social and political conscience was his best friend Fermín Valdés Domínguez, the son of a wealthy slave-owning family.[4] In April the same year, after hearing the news of Abraham Lincoln’s assassination, Martí and other young students expressed their pain—through group mourning—for the death of a man who had decreed the abolition of slavery in a neighboring country. In 1866, Martí entered the Instituto de Segunda Ensañanza where Mendive financed his studies.[3]

When the Ten Years’ War broke out in Cuba in 1868, clubs of supporters for the Cuban nationalist cause formed all over Cuba, and José and his friend Fermín joined them. Martí had a precocious desire for the independence and freedom of Cuba. He started writing poems about this vision, while, at the same time, trying to do something to achieve this dream.

In March of that year, colonial authorities shut down the school, interrupting Martí’s studies. He came to resent Spanish rule of his homeland at an early age; likewise, he developed a hatred of slavery, which was still practiced in Cuba.[7]

On 21 October 1869, aged 16, he was arrested and incarcerated in the national jail, following an accusation of treason and bribery from the Spanish government upon the discovery of a “reproving” letter, which Martí and Fermin had written to a friend when he joined the Spanish army.[8] More than four months later, Martí confessed to the charges and was condemned to six years in prison. His mother tried to free her son (who at 16 was still a minor) by writing letters to the government; his father went to a lawyer friend for legal support, but all efforts failed. Eventually Martí fell ill; his legs were severely lacerated by the chains that bound him. As a result, he was transferred to another part of Cuba known as Isla de Pinos instead of further imprisonment. Following that, the Spanish authorities decided to repatriate him to
Spain. In Spain, Martí, who was 18 at the time, was allowed to continue his studies with the hopes that studying in Spain would renew his loyalty to Spain.

In January 1871, Martí embarked on the steam ship Guipuzcoa, which took him from Havana to Cadiz. He settled in Madrid in a guesthouse in Desengaño St. # 10. Arriving at the capital he contacted fellow Cuban Carlos Sauvalle, who had been deported to Spain a year before Martí and whose house served as a center of reunions for Cubans in exile. On March 24, Cadiz’s newspaper La Soberania Nacional, published Martí’s article “Castillo” in which he recalled the sufferings of a friend he met in prison. This article would be reprinted in Sevilla’s La Cuestion Cubana and New York’s La Republica. At this time, Martí registered himself as a member of independent studies in the law faculty of the Central University of Madrid. While studying here, Martí openly participated in discourse on the Cuban issue, debating through the Spanish press and circulating documents protesting Spanish activities in Cuba.

On the 27 of November 1871, eight medical students, who had been accused (without evidence) of the desecration of a Spanish grave, were executed in Havana. In June 1872, Fermin Valdés was arrested because of the November 27 incident. His sentence of six years of jail was pardoned, and he was exiled to Spain where he reunited with Martí. On November 27, 1872, the printed matter Dia 27 de Noviembre de 1871 (27 November 1871) written by Martí and signed by Fermin Valdés Dominguez, and Pedro J. de la Torre circulated Madrid. A group of Cubans held a funeral in the Caballero de Gracia church, the first anniversary of the medical students’ execution.

In 1873, Martí’s “A mis Hermanos Muertos el 27 de Noviembre” was published by Fermin Valdés. In February, for the first time, the Cuban flag appeared in Madrid, hanging from Martí’s balcony in Concepcion Jeronima, where he lived for a few years. In the same month, the Proclamation of the First Spanish Republic by the Cortes on February 11, 1873 reaffirmed Cuba as inseparable to Spain, Martí responded with an essay, The Spanish Republic and the Cuban Revolution, and sent it to the Prime Minister, pointing out that this new freely elected body of deputies that had proclaimed a republic based on democracy had been hypocritical not to grant Cuba its freedom. He sent examples of his work to Nestor Ponce de Leon, a member of the Junta Central Revolucionaria de Nueva York (Central revolutionary committee of New York), to whom he would express his will to collaborate on the fight for the independence of Cuba.

In June 1874, Martí graduated with a degree in Civil Rights and Canonical Law. In August he signed up as an external student at the Facultad de Filosofia y Letras de Zaragoza, where he finished his degree by October. In November he returned to Madrid and then left to Paris. There he met Auguste Vacquerie, a poet, and Victor Hugo. In December 1874 he embarked from Le Havre for Mexico. Prevented from returning to Cuba, Martí went instead to Mexico and Guatemala. During these travels, he taught and wrote, advocating continually for Cuba's independence.
He traveled through Florida, Washington, Philadelphia, Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica on an organization mission among the exiled Cubans. On this mission, Martí made numerous speeches and visited various tobacco factories. On December 16 he was poisoned in Tampa. [27]

In 1893, Martí traveled through the United States, Central America and the West Indies, visiting different Cuban clubs. His visits were received with a growing enthusiasm and raised badly needed funds for the revolutionary cause. On June 3 he had an interview with Máximo Gómez in Montecristi, Dominican Republic, where they planned the uprising. In July he met with General Antonio Maceo Grajales in San Jose, Costa Rica. [27]

In 1894 he continued traveling for propagation and organizing the revolutionary movement. On January 27 he published "A Cuba!" in the newspaper Patria where he denounced collusion between the Spanish and American interests. In July he visited the president of the Mexican Republic, Porfirio Díaz, and travelled to Veracruz. In August he prepared and arranged the armed expedition that would begin the Cuban revolution. [28]

**Return to Cuba 1895**

January 12, 1895, the North American authorities stopped the steamship Lagonda and two other suspicious ships, Amadis, and Baracoa at the Fernandina port in Florida, confiscating weapons and ruining Plan de Fernandina (Fernandina Plan). On January 29, Martí drew up the order of the uprising, signing it with general Jose Maria Rodriguez and Enrique Collazo. Juan Gualberto Gómez was assigned to orchestrate war preparations for La Habana Province, and was able to work right under the noses of the relatively unconcerned Spanish authorities. [29] Martí decided to move to Montecristi, Dominican Republic to join Máximo Gómez and to plan out the uprising. [30]

The uprising finally took place on February 24, 1895. A month later, Martí and Máximo Gómez declared the Manifesto de Montecristi, an "exposition of the purposes and principles of the Cuban revolution". [31] Martí had persuaded Gómez to lead an expedition into Cuba.

Before leaving for Cuba, Martí wrote his "literary will" on April 1, 1895, leaving his personal papers and manuscripts to Gonzalo de Quesada, with instructions for editing. Knowing that the majority of his writing in newspapers in Honduras, Uruguay, and Chile would disappear over time, Martí instructed Quesada to arrange his papers in volumes. The volumes were to be arranged in the following way: volumes one and two, North Americas; volume three, Hispanic Americas; volume four, North American Scenes; volume five, Books about the Americas (this included both North and South America); volume six, Literature, education and painting. Another volume included his poetry. [31]
Death

José Martí was killed in battle against Spanish troops at the Battle of Dos Ríos, near the confluence of the rivers Contramaestre and Cauto, on May 19, 1895. Gómez had recognized that the Spaniards had a strong position between palm trees, so he ordered his men to disengage. Martí was alone and seeing a young courier ride by he said: "Joven, a la carga!" meaning: "Young men, charge!" This was around midday, and he was, as always, dressed in a black jacket, riding a white horse, which made him an easy target for the Spanish. The young trooper, Angel de la Guardia, lost his horse and returned to report the loss. The death of Martí was a blow to the "aspirations of the Cuban rebels, inside and outside of the island, but the fighting continued with alternating successes and failures until the entry of the United States into the war in 1898." [33]