

José Martí

(1853-1895)

Cuban Writer and Martyr of Cuban Independence from Spain
For Martí's role in Latin American *modernismo*, see: *Modernismo* Notes



FIRST PERIOD: 1853-1870

1853 José Julián Martí Pérez was born a Spanish citizen in Havana, Cuba, which was a Spanish colony until 1898. Both parents were Spanish immigrants to Cuba. His father, Mariano Martí Navarro, was from Valencia, Spain, and his mother, Leonor Pérez Cabrera, was a native of the Canary Islands. In other words, they were both from the Peninsular periphery of the Spanish colonial empire. José had seven sisters.

1867 José attended the San Alejandro art school (Escuela Profesional de Pintura y Escultura de La Habana).

1868 José published his first poem.

1869-1871 He was exiled to Spain, after months in prison, for engaging in revolutionary activities; Spanish colonial authorities sought to convert him to the colonial cause by supporting him in Spain.

SECOND PERIOD: 1871-1874

1871-1874 He studied in Spain and he earned a doctorate in Civil Rights and Canonical Law at the Universidad de Zaragoza (Spain), and he travelled to France, England, Mexico, Guatemala, Venezuela, and the United States; throughout his travels he worked as a translator, teacher, and journalist.

THIRD PERIOD: 1875-1879

1875-1876 He lived in Mexico, he wrote copiously, and he published a number of articles.

1877 Using the pseudonym Julián Pérez (see his full Spanish name above) he tried to return to Cuba, but was refused entry, so he moved to Guatemala City in a neighborhood of artists and intellectuals. There he wrote the play *Patria y Libertad: drama indio* (Country and Liberty: an Indian Play), he met Guatemala's President, and he became the Chair of the Department of Humanities and Foreign Languages at the Universidad Nacional (he was nicknamed *el doctor torrente* because of his torrential Modernist style). He also taught at a girls' academy.

1878 Martí returned to Cuba, where he signed the Pacto de Zanjón at the end of the failed Cuban Ten Years' War of independence against Spain. He married Carmen Zayas Bazán, but he was forbidden to practice law in Cuba, at which rejection he joined the independence movement including the Comité Revolucionario Cubano de Nueva York,

1878 Their son José Francisco Martí Zayas was born.

FOURTH PERIOD: 1880-1890

1880 He worked in **New York City** as the leader of the Cuban Revolutionary Party.

1881 He moved to Venezuela, where he founded the *Revista Venezolana* journal (Venezuelan Review), but the Venezuelan dictator hated the journal and exiled Martí back to New York., where Martí joined Cuban rebel General Calixto García and the latter's revolutionary committee.

1881-1890 Martí earned a living as a journalist for a number of Latin American publications, but most prominently as a foreign correspondent for the great Buenos Aires newspaper, *La Nación*. In addition to poetry, translations, essays, etc., he wrote a children's magazine, *La Edad de Oro*, and he worked as a consul for Uruguay, Argentina, and Paraguay.

1882 *Ismaelillo*, one of the most important collections of *modernista* poetry, was published.

1889 He delivered a major speech, "Mother America" at the Hispanic-American Literary Society in Washington, D.C.

FIFTH PERIOD: 1891-1894

1891 *Versos sencillos*, a major collection of his *modernista* poetry, was published. The lyrics to "Guantanamera" are in a poem in this book of Martí's poetry.

1891 He published the famous article "Nuestra América / Our America" in *La Revista Ilustrada* (New York), in which he spelled out the *modernista* ideal of

- pride in Latin America as a place distinct from Anglo-America (i.e., the United States).
- 1891 His wife and son joined him in New York, but Carmen Zayas and José Francisco returned to Cuba, and the couple separated permanently; he then began a relationship with the Venezuelan Carmen Miyares de Mantilla, with whom he had a daughter, María Mantilla (the mother of the famous Hollywood film actor, César Romero).
- 1891 In Tampa, Florida, he gave two patriotic speeches at the Cuban-American *Club Ignacio Agramonte* in Ibor City, Tampa, Florida, and Herman Norman painted one of the famous portraits of Martí
- 1892 He founded *Patria*, a Cuban journal of letters and politics; he travelled to Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., Florida, and Jamaica, Haiti, the Dominican Republic in support of the cause of Cuban independence.
- 1893 He met the great Nicaraguan modernista poet Rubén Darío in New Mexico thereby joining the First modernista Generation with the Second modernista generation; he also planned an uprising in Cuba Máximo Gómez and General Antonio Maceo Grajales. Furthermore, he delivered another major speech at the Hispanic-American Literary Society in Washington, D.C. in which he praised Simón Bolívar as the hero of South American independence and the major model for Cuban independence.
- 1894 He made his first attempt to start a war of independence in Cuba, but he was stopped in Cuba and sent back to New York.

FINAL PERIOD: 1895

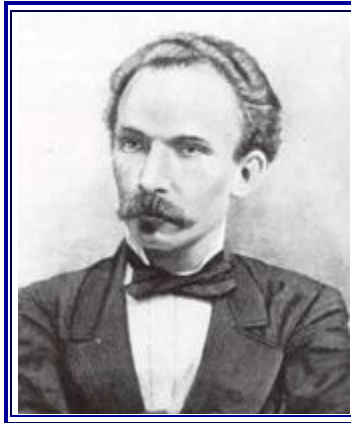
- 1895 With Máximo Gómez, Ángel Guerra, Francisco Borreo, Cesar Salas, and Marcos del Rosario, Martí joined the independence rebellion in Cuba by joining forces with General Máximo Gómez y Báez, the most effective hero of Cuban independence; the expedition sailed from Montecristi, Dominican Republic to Playitas, Cuba, where they joined rebels led by the Maceo brothers, who were already in Cuba; soon they engaged the Spanish royal forces in combat.
- May 19, 1895: Martí was killed in a skirmish at Dos Ríos one month after arriving in Cuba.

Martí was a prolific writer of theater, novels, children's literature, poetry and essays about politics, economics, and culture. He is one of the great Latin American *modernistas*.

Important characteristics of Martí's works are the richness of his ideas and his frequent use of symbols and metaphors. In him we see the combination of a passionate and idealistic man of action who fought for positive social and political goals, and at the same time we see a tormented intellectual striving for independent aesthetic perfection. In terms of style, it is rich, elaborate, elegant, crisp, unpredictable, and complex. In

terms of content, he demonstrated a love for family, a love for all humanity (he was a passionately anti-slavery) and a love for Cuba. For a good Internet link containing Martí's Spanish poetry, see this site: => [*Poesías completas*](#). For all of these reasons, José Martí is considered the "Father of *modernismo*."

For brief notes and a poem by José Martí with English translation and study questions, click on the following image:



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