José Martí

“Nuestra América” (Our America)

& “Mi Raza” (My Race)
José Martí – 1853-1895

Sometimes called the Apostle of the Cuban Revolution, José Martí was born to poor Spanish immigrant parents, on January 28, 1853. He showed a talent for writing and revolutionary politics at an early age. First exiled from Cuba in 1871, Martí spent much of his life abroad. By 1875, Martí had moved to Mexico, where he continued to campaign for Cuban independence. He contributed to several newspapers there and became involved in Mexico City’s artistic community. But he soon became disenchanted with the country’s government, and moved to Guatemala in 1877. Martí became a college professor at the Universidad Nacional, where he taught literature, history and philosophy. By 1881, Martí had settled in New York City. He wrote in both English and Spanish for several newspapers, including a regular column for Buenos Aires ’La Nación’. In 1895, he returned to Cuba to fight for its independence. He died on the battlefield.

José Martí & The Cuban War for Independence

“LATINO AMERICANS”
PBS Video, 9/17/2013,
From Episode 2, “Empire of Dreams”

In English:
- http://video.pbs.org/video/2365076018/ (1st 15 minutes)

In Spanish:
The Cuban War for Independence

- In 1894 Spain canceled a trade pact between Cuba and the United States. The imposition of more taxes and trade restrictions prodded the economically distressed Cubans in 1895 to launch the Cuban War of Independence, a resumption of the earlier struggle. Inspired by José Martí—poet, journalist, and ideological spokesman of the revolution—and employing sophisticated guerrilla tactics under the leadership of Máximo Gómez and Antonio Maceo, the revolutionary army took control of the eastern region, declared the Republic of Cuba in September 1895, and sent Maceo’s forces to invade the western provinces.

The Cuban War for Independence

- ...on March 25, 1895 Martí presented the Proclamation of Montecristi (Manifesto de Montecristi) which outlined the policy for Cuba’s war of independence:
  - the war was to be waged by blacks and whites alike;
  - participation of all blacks was crucial for victory;
  - Spaniards who did not object to the war effort should be spared,
  - private rural properties should not be damaged; and
  - the revolution should bring new economic life to Cuba.

http://www.historyofcuba.com/history/sca/w/sca/w1.htm
The Cuban War for Independence

- By January 1896 rebel forces controlled most of the island, and the Spanish government replaced Martínez Campos with General Valeriano Weyler y Nicolau, who soon became known as El Carnicero (“The Butcher”). In order to deprive the revolutionaries of the rural support on which they depended, Weyler instituted a brutal program of “reconcentration,” forcing hundreds of thousands of Cubans into camps in the towns and cities, where they died of starvation and disease by the tens of thousands.
The Cuban War for Independence

- In 1897 Spain recalled Weyler, offered home rule to Cuba, and, the next year, ordered the end of reconcentration. All this failed to prevent the Spanish-American War. By the time of the American intervention in April 1898, Maceo had been killed and Spain had control of most of the urban areas, but the rebels still controlled about three-fourths of the island’s area, and Cuban resistance to Spanish rule was virtually universal. The war was over by August 12, when the United States and Spain signed a preliminary peace treaty. By the Treaty of Paris of Dec. 10, 1898, Spain withdrew from Cuba. A U.S. occupation force remained for over three years, until the Republic of Cuba was effected on May 20, 1902.
“Barricades of ideas are worth more than barricades of stone.” (p.245)

Key Ideas:
- An End of Artifice & Imitation, Emphasis on Authentic Cuban Identity
- End of Shame - Pride in One’s Historical Roots as a Cuban
- The Establishment of a Government Based on “The Natural Man”
- The Development of a Nation that Can Command Respect from U.S. & European Governments
- An Emphasis on Unity & an End to Internal Racial & Socioeconomic Class Divisiveness
- Spanish Fortification during the Cuban War of Independence (1895-1898)
An End to Artifice & Imitation:

“Those without faith in their country are seven-month weaklings….Their puny arms – arms with bracelets and hands with painted nails, arms of Paris or Madrid – can hardly reach the bottom limb, and they claim the tall tree to be unclimbable.” (p.246)

- Jenny Ybor (daughter of the founder of Ybor Cigar Factory in Havana in 1853, and later in 1868 moved to Ybor City Florida) and Ygnacio Castaneda on their wedding day 1890
- Cuban couple wearing traditional costumes. (Digital Library of the Caribbean)
An End to Shame:

“Those carpenter’s sons who are ashamed that their fathers are carpenters! Those born in America who are ashamed of the mother who reared them because she wears an Indian apron! ...Then who is the real man?” (p.246)

(Frederic/Federico Mialhe, “Bread and Fodder Sellers,” Havana, Cuba, ca. 1850)
“To Govern Well...”

- It has to be a Cuban government based on Cuban ideas & addressing Cuban realities
- It has to be able to unify the various and diverse factions within Cuba – including the Indian, the farmer, the merchants, the Africans & the intellectuals.
- “Good government is nothing more than the balance of the country’s natural elements.”
- “In a new nation a governor means a creator.” (p.247)
  - Decorations for the birth of the Cuban Republic 20 May 1902
“The Natural Man”

- The Natural Man is ...
  - good... (p.247)
  - humble but should never be mistaken for inferior
  - prepared to demand respect – even to the point of force
  - the heart of the country
  - the source of good government

- “The struggle is not between civilization and barbarity but between false erudition and Nature.” (p.247)

- Calixto García and William Ludlow in Cuba, 1898
The Natural Government

“'To know one’s country and govern it with that knowledge is the only way to free it from tyranny.'” (p.248)

The “cultured man” inevitably fails because he doesn’t know anything about “the political factors of [his] own country” & only knows of the U.S. or French revolutionary methods.

“Our Greece must take priority over the Greece which is not ours.” (ibid.)
“The natural statesman arises, schooled in the direct study of Nature. He reads to apply his knowledge, not to imitate. Economists study the problems at their point of origin. Speakers begin a policy of moderation. Playwrights bring native characters to the stage. Academies discuss practical subjects…. Selective and sparkling prose is filled with ideas. In the Indian republics, the governors are learning Indian.” (pp.250-51)

Statue of Martí in Parque Central, Havana.
The Mistakes to be Avoided:

- “The Colony lives on in the republic, and Our America is saving itself from its enormous mistakes…
- The pride of its capital cities
- The blind triumph of a scorned peasantry
- The excessive influx of foreign ideas and formulas
- The wicked and unpoltic disdain for the aboriginal race…” (p.249)
"Our America is to show itself as it is, one in spirit and intent, swift conqueror of a suffocating past, stained only by the enriching blood drawn from hands that struggle to clear away the ruins, and from the scars left upon us by our masters." (p.251)
On Race and Racial Identity:

- “There can be no racial animosity because there are no races.” (p.251)
  - “The soul, equal and eternal, emanates from bodies of various shapes and colors.” (p.252)

- “Everything that divides men, that separates or herds men together in categories, is a sin against humanity.” (p.253)

- “But many white men have forgotten their color, and so have many Negroes. The two races are working together for the improvement of their minds, the propagation of virtue, and the triumph of creative labor and a spirit of charity.” (p.255)
  - A group of teens pose for a picture at a skate park in Havana, Cuba, (tumblr)