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# Boletín Martiano



THE UNIVERSITY  
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CENTER FOR JOSÉ MARTÍ  
STUDIES AFFILIATE

# Boletín Martiano

Newsletter of the Center for José Martí Studies Affiliate  
at The University of Tampa

Editor: Denis Rey, Ph.D.

# Table of Contents

<u>Message from the Editor</u>	<u>Denis Rey, Ph.D.</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>Teaching José Martí in the Contemporary Global Anglophone Literature Classroom</u>	<u>Jenna Grace Sciuto, Ph.D.</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>Teaching José Martí as Man, Myth, and Legend</u>	<u>Rhi Johnson, Ph.D.</u>	<u>10</u>
<u>Butterflies in the Rubble: Teaching Martí During a Pandemic</u>	<u>Genny Ballard, Ph.D.</u>	<u>16</u>
<u>Decentering the Narrative: Teaching the Life and Selected Writing of José Martí</u>	<u>Lisa Nalbone, Ph.D.</u>	<u>28</u>

# Message from the Editor

By Denis Rey, Ph.D.



One important mission of the Center for José Martí Studies Affiliate at the University of Tampa is to promote José Martí in the classroom. Whether through his literary works, journalism, or activism, teaching Martí to American students can pose challenges. Over the years, many of our colleagues have shared their successes and failures when the topic of how best to approach this iconic figure in our courses is broached. In this edition of *Boletín Martiano*, we hear from four educators who have introduced Martí in their classes successfully. Even though the approach, focus, and structure of their lessons may vary, each writer conveys a level of dedication that is not only admirable but also enlightening. Our first essayist, Dr. Jenna Sciuto, has recently published, *Policing Intimacy: Law, Sexuality, and the Color Line in Twentieth-Century Hemispheric American Literature* (2021, University Press of Mississippi). She serves as associate professor in the Department of English and Communication at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, and starts us off with her piece, *Teaching José Martí in the Contemporary Global Anglophone Literature Classroom*. Next, we hear from Dr. Rhi Johnson, who graduated recently with a doctorate in Hispanic Literature from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and now serves in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Indiana University as assistant professor. She shares her experience teaching Martí with her essay, *Teaching Martí as Man, Myth, and Legend*. Dr. Genny Ballard follows with her touching article, *Butterflies in the Rubble: Teaching Martí During a Pandemic*. She serves as professor of Spanish at Centre College, where she engages in community-based learning and has traveled with students to Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama, Cuba, Nicaragua, Spain, and Andorra. *Decentering the Narrative: Teaching the Life and Selected Writing of José Martí*, written by Dr. Lisa Nalbhone, who serves as associate professor of Spanish at the University of Central Florida, concludes the newsletter. Collectively, these essays offer a broad array of how José Martí can be introduced to our students. Through these four dynamic examples, we too can aspire to incorporate Martí into our curriculum. If you would like to share how you approach Martí in the classroom for future consideration, please submit your 2000-word essay to [cjmsa@ut.edu](mailto:cjmsa@ut.edu) and we'll keep the conversation going.

## Teaching José Martí in the Contemporary Global Anglophone Literature Classroom

Jenna Grace Sciuto, Ph.D

In his 1894 piece, “The Truth about the United States,” Cuban writer José Martí asserts that Europeans cannot understand the experiences of colonized peoples: “a people of like-minded Englishmen, Dutchmen, and Germans cannot experience the confusion of political habits that arises in nations where the needs of the conquistador left the natural population alive, terrified, and multiple, and where the way was still barred, with patriarchal blindness, but the privileged caste that the European engendered” (329). Martí observes the important differences in the mentalities of those nations doing the colonizing, as opposed to those impacted, generations before the development of postcolonial theories and binaries—such as “colonizer” vs. “colonized,” “core” vs. “periphery,” or “Global North” vs. “Global South”—used to represent the complex hierarchies and relationships that accompany the takeover of one nation by another. Indeed, although he was writing and thinking decades earlier than most of the theorists I assign, José Martí is a productive addition to my “Global Anglophone Language and Literature” course, centering the lingering effects of colonization alongside forms of resistance in various postcolonial nations. In this essay, I will provide an example of what it looks like to teach José Martí in a global/postcolonial literature course, explore the benefits of such an addition, and examine what is brought to the surface that might be less obvious in other settings.

I taught José Martí for my first time in the spring of 2020, as part of my Global Anglophone literature course, a survey of contemporary postcolonial literature with a particular focus on writing from and about Africa, the Caribbean, and Southeast Asia. In our discussions, we center histories of colonization, language communities, and the conceptualization of the nation-state. Multiplicity and questions of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and identity inform our discussions, as well as the relationship between postcolonial studies and other movements, such as global feminisms.

Throughout our various units, spanning literature from Nigeria, the Dominican Republic, and India, for example, I encourage my students to reflect on the relation between art and revolution, literature and social change, and thus, Martí is a fitting addition to the course.

However, the challenge for me was how to incorporate the work of José Martí, so that it would best inform our discussions of contemporary literature and global society, while still leaving space to explore the time and place from which Martí was writing. I decided to incorporate three texts by Martí into a unit on “Home and Exile,” both as a way to consider different genres, such as short fiction and essays, as well as to explore questions of home, exile, migration, diaspora, race, nationality, identity, and the socio-political challenges faced by Cuba as a nation. I paired three texts by Martí, “A Town Sets a Black Man on Fire” (1892), “My Race” (1893), and “The Truth about the United States” (1894), with three short stories by more contemporary Cuban and Cuban American writers, Ana Menéndez, Nancy Alonso, and Achy Obejas, and dedicated one class period to each set of texts.

On the first day of this unit, I introduced the writing assignment, so that the students would be thinking and talking about connections throughout our discussions. I presented José Martí as a central literary, cultural, and political figure to Cuba and the Cuban diaspora, who wrote widely from New York in the 1880s and 1890s, situating him in time as well as space. The assignment asks that the students work both intertextually and transhistorically to use writings by Martí as a lens through which to read contemporary Cuban and Cuban American literature, leaving space for the particulars of each writer’s situatedness. I ask that they center their discussions on a particular theme or topic of interest that might serve as a point of connection, and I offer options, including race relations, gender dynamics, class structures, performativity, neo-imperialism/expansion, violence, social hierarchies and inequalities, Inter-American relations, and/or art and revolution.

After discussing the assignment and suggesting a few example topics, I provided a brief colonial history of Cuba and its relationship to the US, as well as intensive biographical information on the multiple Martí's: Martí as a writer, thinker, poet, and also as a Cuban patriot and national hero, standing for a free Cuba "with all and for the good of all" (xv). (I thank Dr. James López at the University of Tampa for this helpful framing.) We next engaged in open dialogue on the three pieces they read with an eye to the broader themes of the course, including intersectionality, identity, race relations, violence, and colonial histories and dynamics between different spaces. We began with "A Town Sets a Black Man on Fire," before shifting to "My Race" and "The Truth about the United States"—a progression that worked well to open up discussion, building towards some of the denser, more challenging passages and concepts.

More specifically, in our discussion of "A Town Sets a Black Man on Fire," which provides a view of the violence and racism of the southern US from an outsider perspective, we parsed through Martí's references, including to spectacle lynching, cake walks, and Liberia, as well as the intricacies of race relations in Cuba vs. the US and Martí's understanding the implications of the US setting for Cuba. I introduced them to the interconnection of form and content in Martí's writing: for instance, his use of repetition, such as the phrases "ten thousand souls" and "five thousand souls" (310) in the opening to demonstrate the endemic and accepted nature of this violence, which alongside the use of questions creates pathos to draw in readers. Further, the fact that the essay is bookended with the repetition of "five thousand souls" adds emphasis through irony—this centering of souls in the midst of such observed cruelty. Context remained important to our discussion of "My Race" and its focus on race and racism in Cuba vs. the US. Without context, Martí's specific attempts to unite Black and White Cubans to work towards the joint cause of independence from Spain might seem like a disjointed, outdated discussion of the "colorblindness" variety from today's perspective, conflating Black and White prejudices equally as "racism" without attention to the nuances of other power dynamics or social structures, such as class, gender, and nationality.

However, in context the students were able to see the more revolutionary impacts of Martí's discussion of race and its direct opposition to the racial hierarchies central to the colonial system as a whole and deeply embedded in colonial Cuban society.

Similarly, aspects of his "The Truth about the United States" illustrated for them the many ways in which Martí may be seen as ahead of his time. We analyzed his claims, such as that there "are no races: there is nothing more than mankind's various modifications of habit and form in response to the conditions of climate and history in which he lives, which do not affect that which is identical and essential" (329), as containing shades of the late twentieth century theories of scholars like Ian Haney López that race is socially constructed. Following the full class discussion, the students broke up into pairs to close read particular passages with an eye to the relationship between the language, for instance, the word choice, rhetorical devices, and the meaning of the piece overall to deepen their engagement with the texts and help prepare them for the essay assignment. And, of course, I played different versions of Guantanamera while they worked!

Day 2 began with an overview of US-Cuban relations from 1959 to the present before shifting to a discussion of Cuban biologist, professor, and writer Nancy Alonso, her work in *Closed for Repairs* (2003), and its focus on the Special Period in the 1990s. (Thanks to Ann Fountain for bringing this work to my attention and generously providing me with a copy.) We also discussed US writer of Cuban-descent Ana Menéndez and her story centering on Cuban exiles in Miami, "In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd" (2001), and Cuban American Achy Obejas's story "Kimberle" (2017), which deals more directly with gender expectations and sexuality. This latter story is less overtly connected to our previous discussions: the protagonist is a Cuban immigrant, but that is not a focus of the story, aside from her friend's racist comments and a few memories of her family and Cuba.



However, I purposely chose a diverse range of stories to open up the conversation as much as possible and leave space for revisions, refractions, and reverberations of the original concepts and histories discussed on the first day, expanding or even challenging their expectations about what Cuban diasporic writing looks like. Having spent time working with José Martí's prose last class, I asked them to reflect on what they noticed about the contemporary stories that they may not have otherwise.

To conclude, I would like to share a few of the connections drawn by my students in their comparative analyses to demonstrate the multiple levels on which they were able to recognize productive parallels. One student focused on Martí's use of dark humor and metaphor in relating the public execution of Black Americans to a cake walk in "A Town Sets a Black Man on Fire" to Maximo's use of humor to deal with the trauma layered in his experiences as an exile from Cuba in Menedez's "In Cuba I was a German Shepard." Another looked at Martí and Alonso through the lens of Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's concept of the single story, and the ways in which both writers explore the tensions between expectations, stereotypes, assumptions, and experiences of reality. And a third close read depictions of race in Martí and Obejas in relation to theories of race as socially constructed, alluded to above. Overall, I was very impressed by the connections the class drew. The addition of Martí and the historically grounded discussions of Cuba and the Cuban diaspora enabled them to look across time, drawing stylistic and thematic connections between a diversity of texts. They zeroed in not only on the specific and local impacts of these histories and experiences, but also on the ways in which they spiral out from Martí writing in New York in the late nineteenth century to Cuban and Cuban American authors, including Alonso, Menedez, and Obejas, writing from the twentieth century up until the present period, illustrating the lingering effects of colonization on today's global society.

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**Reading Literature through Martí**

Paper length: 2-3 pages, typewritten, double-spaced

Prose: José Martí, "A Town Sets a Black Man on Fire" (1892), "My Race" (1893), "The Truth about the United States" (1894)

Stories: Ana Menéndez, "In Cuba I Was a German Shepherd" (2001); Nancy Alonso, "I'll Explain it to You" (2007); Achy Obejas, "Kimberle" (2017)

José Martí, a central literary, cultural, and political figure to Cuba and the Cuban diaspora, wrote widely from New York in the 1880s and 1890s. While with good reason, many scholars position him as ahead of his time in many ways, he is also a product of his period and the spaces in which he circulated. This assignment asks that you work both intertextually and transhistorically to use writings by Martí as a lens through which to read contemporary Cuban and Cuban American literature. For instance, Pilar states in Cristina García's novel *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992) that art "is the ultimate revolution" (235). How does this concept relate to the relationship between revolution and writing or language in Martí's texts?

Your discussion should center on a particular theme or topic of interest to you that might serve as a connection between Martí's writing and the fiction of Ana Menéndez, Nancy Alonso, and Achy Obejas, such as race relations, gender dynamics, class structures, performativity, neo-imperialism/expansion, violence, social hierarchies and inequalities, Inter-American relations, and/or art and revolution. Be sure to contextualize your discussion, leaving space for the particulars of each writer's situatedness.

- Select a theme or topic discussed in the writings by Martí that relates well to your understanding of Menéndez's, Alonso's, or Obejas's fiction.
- Identify direct passages from each text that demonstrate this connection. You must quote from each writing, but the balance is up to you.
- Analyze the passages as evidence for your connection, and close read the language of the texts: what specific words or phrases led you to the ideas you express?
- Consider the broader significance of this theme or topic for each text as a whole: why is this theme important for your understanding of the literature in particular?



Jenna Grace Sciuto is Associate Professor of English at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. Her first book, *Policing Intimacy: Law, Sexuality, and the Color Line in Twentieth-Century Hemispheric American Literature*, was published by the University Press of Mississippi in 2021. Her work has appeared in *ARIEL*, *The Global South*, *The Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies*, *Faulkner and the Black Literatures of the Americas* (University Press of Mississippi, 2016), and *Southern Comforts: Drinking and the US South* (Louisiana State University Press, 2020). She has been named a 2021-2022 American-Scandinavian Foundation Fellow and a 2021 Northeast Modern Language Association Summer Fellow.

## Teaching José Martí as Man, Myth, and Legend

Rhi Johnson, Ph.D

The following sets out a modified version of how I used Martí as an essayist, a historical figure, and a cultural referent as the centerpiece of a three-week unit that investigates the intersections between societal myth, cultural fiction, and historical events.

This unit was for a sixth-semester cultural studies elective, for Hispanic Literatures and Cultures majors and minors, as well as those doing a Professions minor or looking for an elective for a Spanish linguistics degree. The course, *Rolling into the Spanish-Cuban-American War: Labor, Race, and Gender in Three Transatlantic Tobacco Towns, 1886-1898*, took up the finisecular tobacco towns of Ybor City, Florida; A Coruña, Galicia; and Durham, North Carolina to see the lead up to the Spanish-Cuban-American war from the perspective of all three combatants, while creating a personal connection for students.

The course was taught at a university in North Carolina with a high percentage of in-state students and access to extensive historical archives, which the students explored on a series of class days. Multiple students in the class had roots in the NC tobacco industry, and even those who did not lived surrounded by its remains. The course included literary, journalistic, administrative/legal, and visual documents from all three towns, which allowed students to see differences and connections between these three geographic locales that were so connected by a shared industry and history of violence.

This unit on Martí, or one like it, would work in a variety of literature and cultural studies courses, both in Spanish-language courses, and, as almost all of the texts used are available in translation or with English-language subtitles, in English-language courses as well. Since Martí lived and wrote in the US for the majority of his adult life, he is a part of US literary history as well as Spanish and Cuban.

### Overview of unit:

The unit encompasses three weeks with linked learning objectives related to content as well as to the course's goal of introducing cultural studies as a field of many possibilities: one week of readings from Martí, one week of retrospective reinterpretations of his life and words, and one week on a group project that investigates his role as a cultural myth. By using different kinds of readings and materials from different historical moments, we were able to discuss genre and literary technique, diachronic shifts in representation, and the appropriation of cultural figures for movements with which they may or may not be aligned.

### Week 1: Reading Martí

#### Readings:

Martí, José. Carta a Gómez el 20 de Octubre (1884); "Con todos y para el bien de todos" (1891); "Los pinos nuevos" (1891); "El negro en los EEUU" (1892); "Mi raza" (1893); "Diario de campaña" (1895, selections)

The three class sessions of this week are divided thematically. The first day is for Martí's writing on race in/and the US. Student discussions on the omnipresence of racial violence in the US South at the end of the 1800s, as well as the race-blindness of Martí's construction of racial politics were very fruitful, and particularly so given that the previous week centered Blackness in North Carolina and in Ybor City. Texts included the Black-run newspaper the *Raleigh Gazette*— full of coverage of lynching and how the duty of the Black man is to lift up his race— and Susan Greenbaum's "Martí and Jim Crow" from *More Than Black: Afro-Cubans in Tampa*. Seeing the contemporary reporting by US writers in contrast to Martí really put his racial politics into perspective, and allowed discussion to avoid presentism, except when it was intentionally brought to bear. The second day is for the two speeches that Martí gave in Tampa and the October 20 letter to the general Máximo Gómez—all of which deal with the Cuban republic-to-be, the trajectory of the independence movement, and the grassroots idealism which was funding it. The third day is dedicated to selections from Martí's "Campaign Diary," a rich text on the experience of war and the touchstone for the next week of the course.

## Week 2: Representing Martí

### Readings:

Cartaya, Gabriel. *Domingos de tanta luz*. SurcoSur, 2019.

*Páginas del diario de José Martí*. Directed by José Massip, 1971.

The first two days of this week are dedicated to Cartaya's book *Domingos de tanta luz* (English version, with translation by Kenya Dworkin: *So Much Light: The Last Twenty Sundays of Cuban Freedom Apostle José Martí*). This volume is a fantastic work of which draws from both Martí's writing and other sources to present an intimate picture of the final twenty Sundays of his life. In a way that was particularly useful for this class, the book blurs the lines between primary and secondary sources, between fiction and nonfiction. The final day is dedicated to the experimental 1972 Cuban film *Páginas del diario de José Martí* (Pages from José Martí's Diary), which is a vivid, surreal recreation of various passages from the "Campaign Diary." Together, these texts give for great discussion on genre, the function of literature, and representation, as well as deepening the discussion of Martí's own works.

## Week 3: Group project: Mythic Martí

### Bank of texts for project:

*Raza*. Directed by José Luis Sáenz de Heredia, 1942.

*La muerte de un burócrata*. Directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industrias Cinematográficas, 1966.

*José Martí: El ojo del canario*. Directed by Fernando Pérez Valdés, Wanda Films / TVE, 2010.

Collected diachronic visual representations of Martí, following the research of Solem Minjárez, such as: <https://prezi.com/p/g3n66bbfwtmz/jose-marti-en-las-artes-visuales/>

Anyone or more of the texts used in this week could also work as readings for normal class days, but for this course, I used this third week on Martí for a group interpretive project on a piece of media that uses Martí as part of its construction of a national myth. For the project, each small group had their own piece of media, with the goal of engaging with how 20th/21st century media uses the image and idea of Martí, to explore the myth that has grown up around him and to raise the ideas of the *use* of a historical figure as something different than the *representation* of that figure.

The output of the project, for which students had two class sessions plus time outside of class, was a video or multimedia discussion of their text that both presented it to the rest of the class, and offered a cohesive analysis of the representation of Martí that it contained in comparison to other texts from the course. Viewing the projects of other groups was then the homework for the final day of the week, which closed the unit. While doing this kind of analysis was a challenge, the outcomes, and particularly the following discussion were fantastic.

#### Conclusions:

Taken by itself, this unit was very successful in familiarizing students with José Martí as a historical figure, a writer, a revolutionary, and a cultural myth. The diversity of texts allowed for discussions of form as well as content and context. The group projects demonstrated a high level of understanding of historical and cultural interconnectivity, as well as a solid understanding of Martí texts. While I frequently teach a single Martí essay in introductory literature and culture classes, often parts of "Nuestra América," he tends to be something of a hard sell, because he is so enmeshed in the political and social milieu of his time. In the context of this longer unit, Martí started to become a touchstone for students, rather than a "difficult" writer whose style raises their affective filter.

In the context of the course as a whole, because of this unit, students approached documentation of the Spanish-Cuban-American war itself through Martí, which immediately allowed the narratives of the conflict to be more complex for them, without that complexity being overwhelming or off-putting. Rather, his discussion of the goals of the independence movement of the grassroots fundraising in Tampa became a lens through which to look at US and Spanish representations of the conflict, and to really dig into how they minimized the role and goals of the Cuban independence movement.

Subsequent course readings on the war itself:

Spanish political cartoons in Charnon-Deutsch, Lou. "Cartooning the 'Splendid Little War' of 1898." *Hold That Pose: Visual Culture in the Late Nineteenth-Century*



*Spanish Periodical*, Penn State UP, 2008, pp. 109-144.

United States political cartoons in Pérez, Louis A, Jr. *Cuba in the American*

*Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos*, U of North Carolina P, 2008.

Gonzales, N.G. *In Darkest Cuba: Two Months Under Gomez Along the Trocha from the*

*Caribbean to the Bahama Channel (1922)* (selections- by a US soldier)

Dunbar, Paul Laurence. "The Conquerors: The Black Troops in Cuba" (1898)

*El Suicidio de España: detalles, episodios y juicios críticos de la Guerra Hispano-*

*Americana* en 1898, por varios testigos presenciales. (selections)

Witherbee, Sydney A. Spanish-American war songs; a complete collection of

newspaper verse during the recent war with Spain, 1898. ("President McKinley's

Tribute to the Soldiers," selections)

Documents like the Peace Treaty between Spain and the US and the Platt amendment in the Cuban constitution.

Personal epistolary of the war by NC soldiers, in the North Carolina Collection at special archives of UNC's Wilson Library.

Relevant assessment: True fiction narrative

The skills and discussion modes around *Domingos de tanta luz* were also the basis for one of the main assessments in this course, which pairs well with this unit. This assignment is a praxis in information synthesis from primary texts and complex narrative language production, based on the ideas of creative nonfiction and "thick description," as laid out in Clifford Geertz's "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." The assignment is to write a narrative account of a short period of time from the point of view of a created character in the real world of Ybor City in the 1890s. Students could use a historically important day, like that of one of Martí's speeches, or just a normal period of time. The goal was to create an engaging narrative and believable character and situations, while incorporating as much detailed primary source documentation as possible.

In addition to the narrative, students compiled a packet of the primary sources that they had located and utilized. This project, like the Martí group project, was a very fruitful exercise, and showed students how much they could pull from primary document; the quality was universally very high. Students appreciated a research project that was not focused on academic language and properly supporting a thesis statement, while still developing their research skills and their writing praxis in Spanish. The assignment is to write a narrative account of a short period of time from the point of view of a created character in the real world of Ybor City in the 1890s. Students could use a historically important day, like that of one of Martí's speeches, or just a normal period of time



Rhi Johnson is an Assistant Professor at Indiana University Bloomington, specializing in Iberian Modernities, with a focus on new materialisms, gender and sexuality, and medical humanities in the 18<sup>th</sup> and long 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Their ecocritical anthology of Rosalía de Castro's poetry in translation, *Because I Want to See the Sea* is available from Valparaíso Editions.

## Butterflies in the Rubble: Teaching Martí During a Pandemic

Genny Ballard, Ph.D

In March of 2020, my students and I were painting a mural on campus. Each student had paint, a plan, and a 3-meter section to paint. The mural was the culmination of a series of assignments related to artistic expression in my first-year studies class called *Our America*. On their panel the students were ready to paint the message that they want to share with the world before they die in reference to the first stanza of *Simple Verses*. “I am an honest man, from where the palm tree grows, and I want, before I die, to cast these verses from my soul.” (Martí, 273) The mural was beautiful. Students used their space to cast many different messages from their souls: political messages, thoughts about love, peace, hope, music, the environment, and family. But as we were finishing the first day of painting and students picked up their cellphones messages began flooding in about the possibility that in-person classes would end and we would go into lockdown. That was the last day of class for the semester. The mural remained incomplete. And I found myself for the next few weeks thinking about another line from that same poem. “Wings I saw springing from fair women's shoulders, and from beneath rubble I've seen butterflies flutter.” (Martí, 273). I hoped that would will emerge from this rubble intact.



Image 1. Cast these verses from my soul: a mural of representing the message that each student wants to share with the world.

As a professor of Spanish and Latin American Studies at Centre College in Kentucky, I have the liberty to design my own courses, choose the texts, and implement the activities that I believe will most benefit my students. I was grateful to be part of the 2019 NEH Summer Institute “José Martí and the Immigrant Communities of Florida in Cuban Independence and the Dawn of the American Century.” Being a part of the seminar gave me the opportunity to learn from my colleagues in different disciplines and develop an undergraduate seminar focusing on the works of José Martí. I taught the course that I developed during the NEH seminar in spring 2020, as the pandemic began. Centre College is a small liberal arts college of about 1400 students. As a professor, I teach all levels of Spanish language, literature and culture. I also teach a first-year studies course called *Our America/ Nuestra America*. I appreciate the opportunity to share my experience.



Image 2: A sample of the panels from the mural. Artwork by Anna Impellitteri

In the first-year studies course, Our America, we explore together the way the arts shape American identities, reinforce and resist social constructs, and can help build or dismantle nations. One of the first texts that students read for this course is José Martí's *Nuestra America*. We divide the work into five sections and in small groups the class analyzes their section to create a three-meter long hand-drawn infographic explaining their section. They then present their poster as a presentation. For this activity we use paper and markers and students sit on the floor with a marked-up section of the text to guide them.



Image 3. Art by Meghan Owens: Our America Infographics. 2020.

During the next part of this first-year studies class we learn that statues of Martí can be found all over Cuba and in other parts of the world today. The students see the film: *Heroe de culto* about the proliferation of bust statues of José Martí throughout Havana. After the film, the students divide their part of the essay *Our America* into smaller sections. With their bodies they create statues to represent four quotations from the section that they have analyzed. One student from the group reads the quotation and others form the statues.

These are the instructions for the activity:

*Our America* Vitrines

1. Divide your section of the text into 3-4 parts. Choose important quotations to read from each sub-section.
2. Represent those parts as static scenes like statues that you can see in a window box.
3. One student narrates and the others are the statues in a vitrine story presentation.
4. Change scenes in the box at least four times. \_\_\_\_\_

As an instructor, I only assess the presentations for the *Our America* activities. I use a rubric and the students know ahead of time what was going to be graded. However, this has not inhibited their creativity. Students submitted beautiful artwork that they obviously spent time crafting. They also took risks in their performances. These are activities that I will repeat because I believe that by interpreting the essay *Our America* multiple ways the students arrive at a deeper understanding of the work. For this course the essay *Our America* is a fundamental text because it introduces the concept that there are important cultural values in Latin America like racial harmony and the rejection of imperialism that are important to consider when developing a nation. I have taught this first-year studies course twice (2020 and 2021) and I have found that this is an excellent text to use to start the course. The other texts, films, music and works of art of this course help students focus on the way Americans (from many different countries) transcend their surroundings to create political and social constructions and the way those constructs are both reflected in and informed by the arts.

In order to start the next section of the course, the students read the children's book *Martí's Song for Freedom/Martí y sus versos por la libertad* by Emma Otheguy. It is a biography of Martí that, among other things, contextualizes the first poem of Martí's *Simple Verses* and explains the reasons for his antiracist ideology. After reading Otheguy's book, the students read several poems from *Simple Verses*. With the first poem I have led two different activities. The first is that we use the first poem in *Simple Verses* (A Sincere Man Am I) as a template to write autobiographical poems.

The second activity that my students do is to turn Martí's poems into a comic strip in the style of Marek Bennett. The instructions are simple. Students have read and analyzed the poems before we begin this lesson and then in class we read Marek Bennett's illustrated version of *To Roosevelt* by Ruben Dario.

After that, we divide the poem *A Sincere Man Am I* into sections and students illustrate the poem as if it were a comic strip. Here is an example by Centre student Maggie Poole:

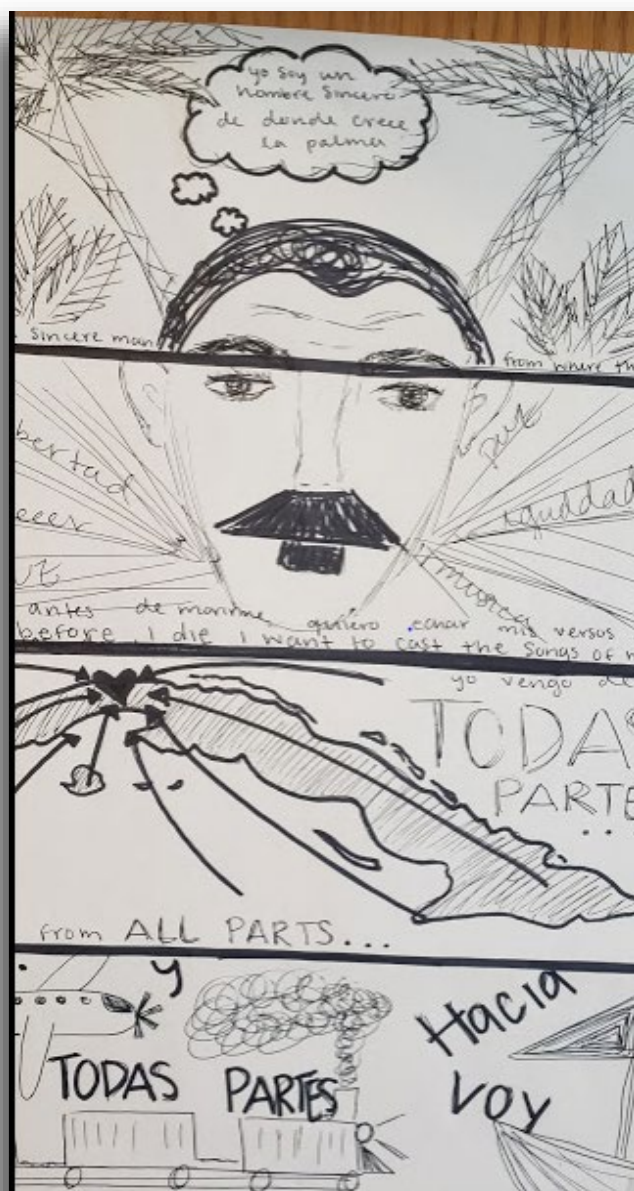


Image 4. Comic strip Martí Poems. Sample by Maggie Pool (2020).

It should be obvious by now that in my classes students use art and movement to reflect on and analyze texts. I have based the lessons that rely on art as a tool for analysis on the work of Lynda Barry and Anu Taranath (references included below). The lessons that require movement and performance and based on the work of Kurt Wooton and Marimar Patron who teach using the performance cycle (Wooton). The first-year studies course begins with Martí but we also read Elizabeth Acevedo's *Clap When You Land*, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe* by Fannie Flagg, and *Olio* by Tyehyma Jess. We also see two films: *A Better Life* and *The Black Panther*. One of the most important aspects of this class is that it has a collaborative online learning component where the students all have partners in Colombia. The students get to examine and share their own cultures while comparing it to other cultures in the Americas during this project.

In spring semester of 2020, I taught a Senior Seminar class for undergraduate Spanish majors focused on the essays and poems of José Martí. During the NEH Summer Seminar I designed a website to use as an interactive syllabus and repository for activities, art, and video clips.

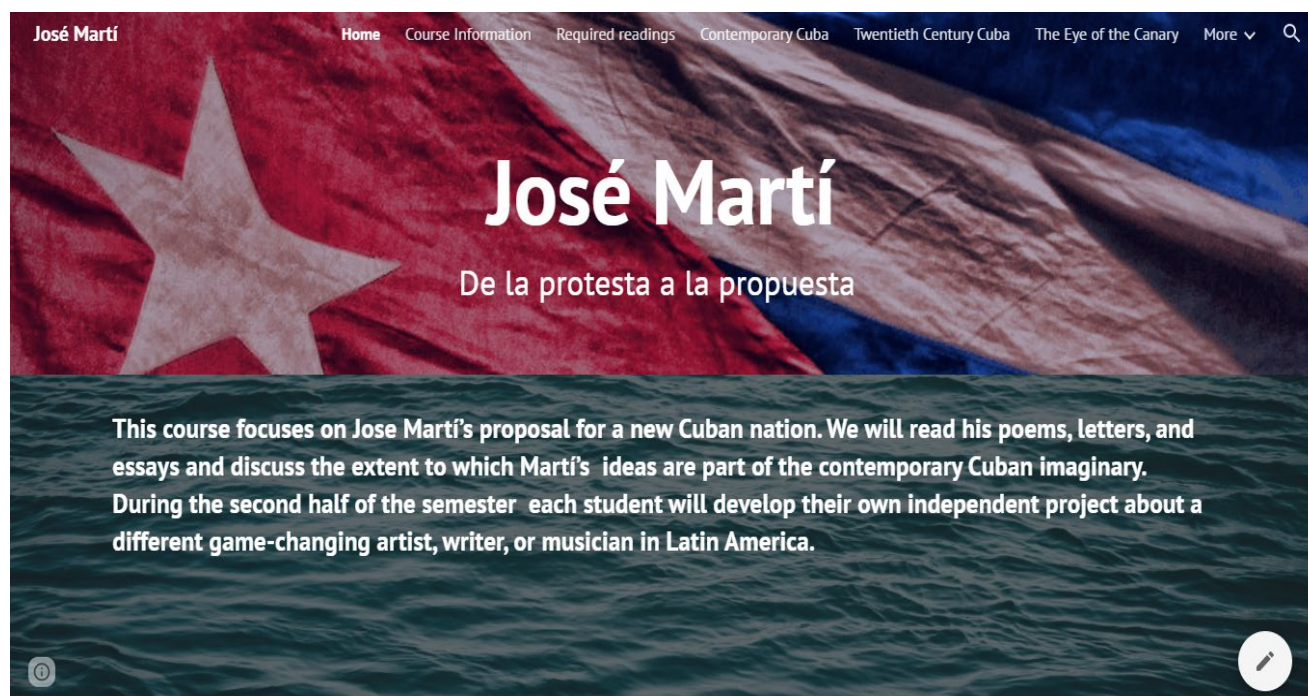


Image 5. A screenshot of the website I designed for the José Martí Senior Seminar.



This course, *José Martí: from Protest to Proposal*, is a senior seminar where the students all read the same Martí texts for the first half of the semester and then after mid-term the students design their own project based on the work of another author or artist. The texts we read for this course varied but were all related in some way to Cuban independence, racial harmony, or nation building. This course focuses on José Martí's proposal for a new Cuban nation. We read his poems, letters, and essays and discussed the extent to which Martí's ideas are part of the contemporary Cuban imaginary.

These are the texts that my students read for the course:

*Simple Verses* (selected poems)

*Tributes to Karl Marx* (1883)

*Coney Island* (1883)

*With All and for the Good of All* (1891)

*A Town Sets a Black Man on Fire* (1892)

*The New Pines* (1891)

*My Race* (1893)

*To Cuba!* (1894)

*The Golden Age* (1889)

*The Truth About the United States* (1894)

*The Montecristi Manifesto* (1895)

*Letter to Manuel Mercado* (1895)

*A Vindication of Cuba* (1889)

*Our America* (1891)

By reading and analyzing these texts my students were able to see how Martí not only called for revolution and independence but also provided a roadmap for founding and developing a new Cuba. We took time as a class exploring the proposals of many different Latin American artists, musicians, and writers. The idea for the theme of this course came from Cuban singer Alexey Rodriguez who says that "Hip Hop is not a protest but a proposal."

All of the students used José Martí's ideas about how to bring about change in their projects. As a capstone project for their major, each of my students developed their own website and shared their projects. During the final exam period the students and all of the Spanish professors meet to hear the majors deliver their final presentation.

For each of the readings we completed activities and held discussions. In this essay, I will focus on just two. In one of the first lessons, students compare four versions of the song *Guantanamera* based on the first poem in *Simple Verses* (Martí, 273). After hearing the version of *Guantanamera* by *Song Around The World* we discuss the importance of the song to Cubans everywhere. After a discussion about the relationship between music and identity each student chooses a song that for them represents their culture. We talk about the difference between a national anthem, songs with important cultural significance and personal anthems. The students use this discussion as the basis for a conversation they have with their collaborative online partners (COIL) in Colombia.

The assignment:

**You have a partner to work with on two graded assignments this semester.** You and your partner (one from Centre College and the other from La Universidad del Norte) will discuss music in your respective cultures, and share both your thoughts and the music itself.

**Assignment, Music and Culture.** Music can be a powerful expression of culture on the one hand, and an illustration of globalization on the other. Throughout many parts of the world, governments and individuals alike take action to preserve music seen as connected to some larger collective identity. Here you'll take some time to reflect on music as a part of your own cultural identity, while also learning about that of your partner.

*Guantanamera* is not the official national anthem of Cuba however as you can tell from what we have learned in the last class it is the unofficial hymn of Cubans all over the world.

Here are some questions that will help you begin the conversation with your partner:

1. What is the song from your country or state that truly represents the culture and people?
2. What are some classic songs from your region of the country?
3. Describe some of the aspects of culture in your country.
4. How does a national anthem of a country represent its culture?
5. What song represents you as a person?
6. What is the theme/message of your selected song?
7. Why did you choose that song?

What you will submit:

1. Create a Google Doc for you and your partner.
2. Post the following items on your Google Doc
  - A two paragraph text answering the questions.
  - Links to the songs/music videos
3. Share the Google Doc with your professor.

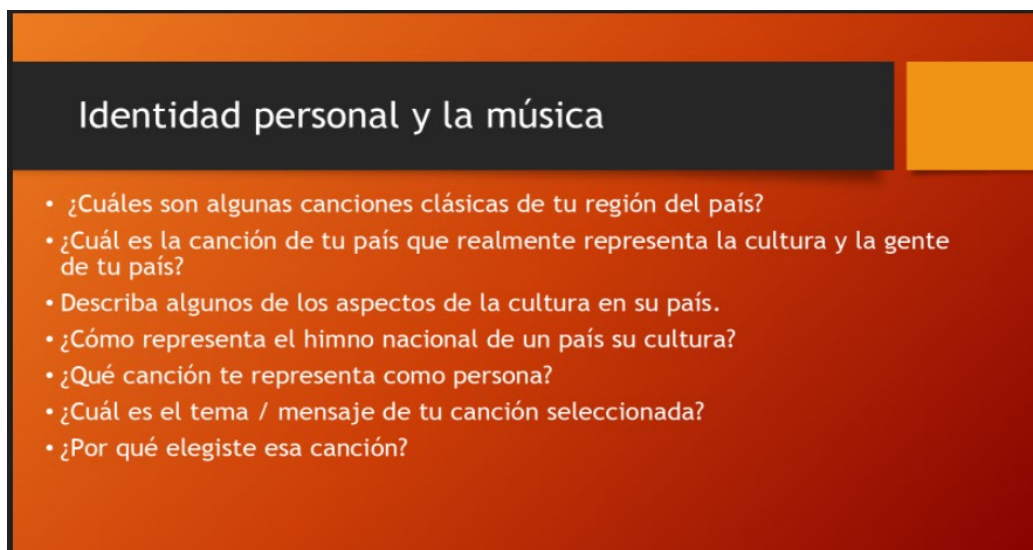


Image 6. This is an example of the conversation about music from the course website. All PowerPoints, activities and writing prompts are linked to the website for the class.

Just as a reminder this seminar was held in spring of 2020 which was not only the beginning of the pandemic but also a time of outrageous violence perpetrated by the police against black people in the U.S. and also start of antiracist movements and marches for racial justice. For the reading *A Town Sets a Black Man on Fire* we had a silent conversation. The students each had their own blank poster pinned up in the room. They selected a quotation from the text and wrote it in the middle of the page and under it they asked a question. Students draw lines between questions and answers so that other participants can follow the conversation and contribute. For twenty-minutes students walked around the room and wrote answers to the questions posed by their classmates and made comments about the texts and their classmates' responses to it. After time was up each student went back to their own poster and read the conversations. The students have a few minutes to choose which of the comments they want to share out loud and respond to. This activity was memorable in our seminar because it allowed students to process violent images at a volatile time in silence. Holding the conversation in silence was powerful.

Reflecting on racial violence is difficult but so important and for us this activity was successful in that it gave us the opportunity to examine difficult concepts.

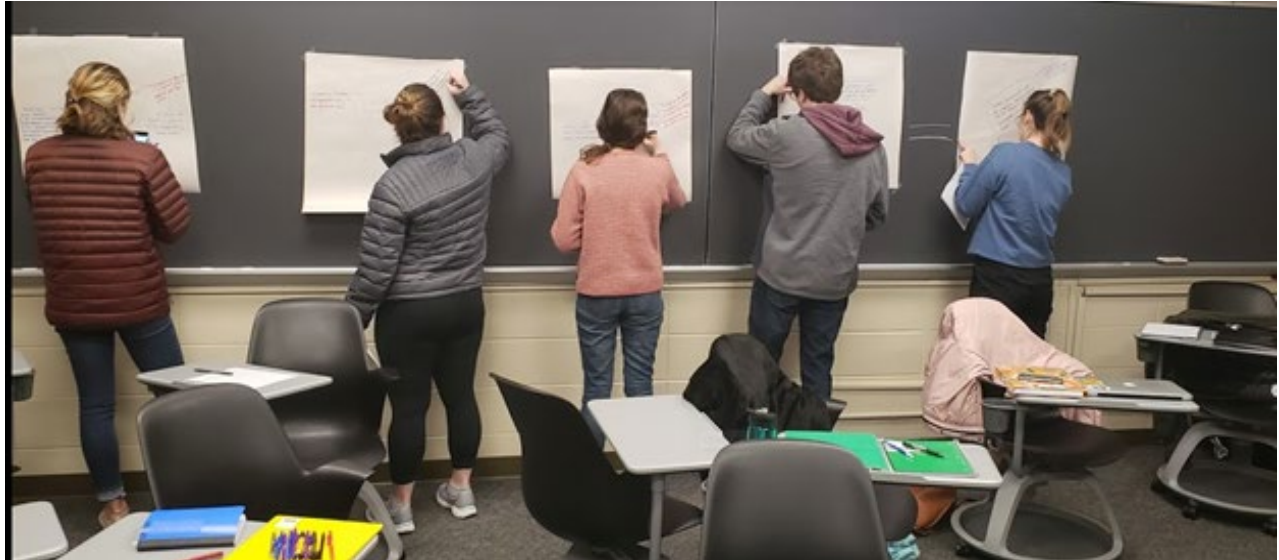


Image 7. Silent conversation about *A Town Sets a Black Man on Fire*

In this essay I have presented a few of the lessons that I have developed using the works of José Martí with undergraduate students. I use the works of Martí in three different kinds of undergraduate classes: a senior seminar, first-year studies classes in English and Spanish language, literature and culture classes. In the two years since the NEH seminar, there have been so many changes in our lives. The way I teach has been altered by the pandemic but not all of the changes are bad. I have found ways to keep the things I like about my classes. Before the seminar I had never used the works of José Martí in my classes. And since the seminar, I have included some works by Martí in nearly every class I teach. It was challenging to adapt the lessons I prepared to an online setting when we went to remote teaching. But because I was motivated and had already prepared the lessons and shared them through the website that I created during the seminar the transition wasn't as bad as it could have been. I am most of all grateful for the colleagues that I met during the seminar. They are most certainly the butterflies in the rubble of the past eighteen months. I welcome feedback and conversations about the ideas that I shared. I am looking forward to developing these lessons further.

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## Decentering the Narrative: Teaching the Life and Selecting Writing of José Martí

Lisa Nalbone, Ph.D

Exploring the life and writing of José Martí opens avenues of critical inquiry that leads to a broader understanding of the *fin de siglo* and the complex relationship between Spain and Cuba relating to the imperial presence on the island and the tensions that arise from the uneven power relationship between the two countries. Further, this exploration serves as a vehicle to decenter Eurocentrism for its transnational perspectives that challenge the dominant narrative surrounding Spain's presence in the island, an issue that becomes more complex as Martí's involvement intensifies to varying degrees with the, mainly political, contemporaneous events in other nations, including the US, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Mexico.

In essence, Martí lived during the forefront of decolonization and dedicated his life's work to the indefatigable push toward his homeland's independence. My approach to teaching Martí follows Claire Kramsch's conclusions that "The concept of decolonization has been rendered inordinately more complex by globalization. There are no longer any clear-cut distinctions between colonizers and colonized, but various spheres of influence that require critical dialogue and political engagement" (69). This, then, moves us in the direction of reading Martí through the lens of burgeoning decolonization along the lines of Aníbal Quijano and Walter D. Mignolo, who discuss the colonial matrix of power as it challenges decolonization paradigms. For Mignolo, "Decolonial thinking has as its reason of being and its objective the decoloniality of power (that is to say, of the matrix of colonial power)" (48). By virtue of adopting a global rather than international perspective of decolonization, students begin to perceive national borders as transmutable lines not as markers of a geography but as a locus of resistance within which is forged a newly constructed image of *patria*.

For Spanish Peninsularists such as myself who may have traditionally viewed the hegemon/subaltern dynamic as a binary paradigm that captured the essence of a power imbalance, examining the enduring role Martí played in Cuban politics and literature through his accomplishments and writing allows for us to contextualize Spain's eventual end of empire if not as inevitable but as a culminating event

influenced—directly or tangentially—by Martí’s impactful actions and words aligned with his steadfast vision of Cuba’s independence movement.

My teaching of Martí has become a vital curricular component in two literature courses I teach relating to turn of the 19th to 20th century Spain with a focus on writers of the traditionally-termed Generation of 1898, one at the senior undergraduate and the other at the graduate level, both taught in Spanish. I have also delivered guest lectures in an upper-level class taught in English designed for Latin American Studies majors titled “Cuba: a Collective Portrait.”

In the literature classes, students learn about the historical context that shaped the late 19th century events as rooted in Spain’s Revolution of 1868 that culminated with the dethronement of Queen Isabel II, coinciding also with a turn of events that saw the beginning of the Ten Years’ War (1868–1878) in Cuba. Students begin to understand how the political turmoil in the period following the 1868 revolution in Spain fueled Cuban independence initiatives, as leaders prioritized attaining political stability on the peninsula. Alda Blanco’s foundational “El fin del imperio español” provides further context as does the documentary “Reyes de España” beginning at about the 26 minute mark with an explanation of the volatility of King Amadeo I’s brief reign after Isabel II’s departure, in conjunction with the military leadership in flux, first under General Francisco Serrano. The Realist and Naturalist literature of this time gave way to a new way of writing at the turn of the century, one that took an inward look at constructs of national identity and strategies to thwart economic and social crises that marked beginning of the 20th century in Spain.

By foregrounding class discussion on events in the Spanish Caribbean, with a focus on Cuba, Martí’s formidable presence emerges as an undeniable force of transformation. When reading Martí’s “My Race,” published in his weekly newspaper *Patria* in 1893, students convey their understanding of Martí’s audience as multinational, primarily from his country of origin but also from the US, where he published the essay, from Spain, and from numerous countries in Spanish America.



The discussion of the intersection of race and gender also provides entry to this text, as does the author's use of rhetorical questions as a way to connect with his readers. Conversations about Martí's constructs of solidarity and equality prove insightful particularly as they give students the opportunity to explore issues of contemporary relevance.

In accessing Martí's "Manifiesto de Montecristi," written in 1895 in the Dominican Republic, students explain selected quotations to underscore the necessity of revolution to free Cuba not simply from Spain, but from Spain's colonial rule. Key phrases include the "betterment and emancipation of the country," "the majesty of a fully constituted republic," and "This war is [...] the disciplined product of the resolve of solid men," as well as the concept of patria.

Reading Martí's modernist texts through the lens of political framework that advocated for Cuban independence from imperial power opens lines of critical inquiry not only of his work as foundationally literary but thematically fraught with the angst of endeavoring to solidify concepts of national identity and governance despite facing marked political opposition from both outside and within his homeland. The fervor for an independent Cuba, while taking root on the island, splayed throughout the diaspora, and became the rallying call for what Alfred J. López terms Martí's "shuttle diplomacy", with his travels up and down the east coast of the US from New York to multiple cities in Florida and west to New Orleans, Louisiana, travels that also included Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Jamaica in a three month-period in 1894 (Hidalgo qtd in A. López) but also extended to Mexico, Panama, Haiti, and Costa Rica.

Further, teaching Martí's "Nuestra América" (1891), perhaps his most widely read essay, alongside Miguel de Unamuno's "La crisis del patriotismo" (1905) prompts students to draw connections between the two writers and their stance on the construct of patriotism. Martí's pro-Cuban independence movement in tandem with his views on the pan-American collective "there is no patria a man can take greater pride in than our long-suffering American republics"—resonates with Unamuno's recognition of the polarization that exists in his homeland, between

the cosmopolitan and regional and his belief that patriotism, honor, and truth in the collective imaginary are the vehicles by which to arrive at patriotism.

The analysis of Martí's selected essays proves a useful exercise to put Spain's loss of empire in critical focus not as a devastating defeat of the colonizer but as a necessary end to the power imbalance that decolonization restored, thus furthering the development of the themes of *patria*, solidarity, and equality as consistent cornerstones to his writing.

In "Cuba: A Collective Portrait," students gain intercultural competence to increase their understanding of life in Cuba beginning with a historical overview of the island before moving to a present-day focus. My presentation on Martí builds on students' knowledge of colonial Cuba and sets the stage for its transition through modernity. I follow James López' framework of Martí as a multifaceted figure: chronicler, teacher, poet, and revolutionary ("Multifaceted Martí"), to expand upon the notion that Martí was simply a Modernist poet. In this context, Modernist writing becomes much more than a literary aesthetic and moves into the realm of politically charged writing as a powerful tool of propaganda. Students ponder, for example, what it meant for Martí to live and write in New York City for approximately the last 15 years of his life.

The rich chronology of events that coincided with Martí's adult life provides additional context within which to situate his enduring legacy not only in Cuba but within the transatlantic geography. Students follow the timeline of Martí's life to understand the international reach of his independence efforts that were inextricably linked with a humanist underpinning, advocating more broadly for freedom and equality for all. Through the dissemination of his journalistic and literary writing beginning in the early 1880s in Honduras, El Salvador, Venezuela, Mexico, Uruguay, Argentina in addition to the US, students formulate a vision of Martí- as a vocal critic of Spain's colonial rule over Cuba.

Students increase their understanding of Martí as a key figure in the period leading up to the Spanish American War to recognize his work and writing in the context of

defending Cuban identity and independence, and to situate his ideals of decolonization as an alternative to Spain's imperial presence in his homeland.

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