
He Came to Fight ... and Became a Star

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A lot has been spoken in the last days about José Martí.

It spurs controversy.

Some say Martí shouldn't have come to Cuba, that he should have stayed in the United States, in organizing tasks from afar, as an intellectual guide.

To say that is like not knowing him. It's to ignore his reach. Not understanding his vital ethics.

The intellectual man and the man of action were one and the same. For him the homeland, came first. The supreme poetry. The beacon, not the stand to step on.

Martí had to come. Martí had to be on the battlefield. He had to share the fate of the men he himself encouraged to fight.

Some say that this decision was practically a suicide, speaking from the fact that he was not a career army man.

But anyone who rereads his famous campaign diary does not find there the voice of a man saying farewell, but the voice of a fighter, a brave, a soldier who struggles between the contradictions of a necessary and harsh war, but who puts above of all his commitment to that war, which is the promise with the freedom of a people.

At the same time, in those pages appears the lyrical and emotional story of a journey, the bedazzling at the beauty of a landscape.

Martí is the politician, the military chief... but he is still the poet.

With clear style, short sentences that contrast with the long sentences of so many articles and speeches, the hero wrote the chronicles. And there is poetry in the chronicle:

The moon looms, red, beneath a cloud. We reach a rocky beach (La Playita by Cajobabo River). I stay in the boat the last in jumping out. I jumped. Great bliss great »—he wrote on April 11th».

Great bliss. The emotion of stepping on Cuba again must have been huge, in an unknown landscape to him, but that he felt as his own, deep inside.

The Campaign Diary is a road map, but spotted here and there with colorful notes.

He wrote April 14th:

«Mambí day.- We leave at 5:00 a.m. Crossing the river at waist depth and cross through it: large baga trees on the shore. Then, resuming the march, heavily loaded, the towering mountain, made of fine-leaved yaya trees, majagua tree from Cuba, and starred copey trees. We see, curled up on a branch, the first hutia ».

And here and there he leaves a testimony of what he feels, of what inspires him:

«And all day long, what light, what air, how full the chest, how light the anguished body! I look outside the ranch, and I see, at the top of the ridge behind, a dove and a star.

You must read the diary. It's a very useful document (perhaps the most useful) to reconstruct that final journey of Martí. He describes everything while telling the incidents.

He wrote on April 22nd:

A day of restless waiting. Bathing in the river, with waterfalls and ponds, and large stones, and eating sugar cane by the riverside. My blue clothes are washed, my jacket. Around noon Luis's brothers appear proud of the homemade meal they brought for us: fried eggs, fried pork and a large cornbread cake. We eat under the rain, and after cutting a patch with the machetes, they set up a tent, covered with the rubber tarps».

There are moments of peace and also the harshness of combat. April 25th:

«Day of war.- We are approaching through sheer wilderness, already near Guantánamo, hostile in the first war, towards Arroyo Hondo. We lost our way. The thorns cutting us deep. The vines lacing around our necks and whipping us. We walk through a forest of green calabash trees, attached to the bare trunk, or a sparse space one from each other. People are emptying the fruits, matching their mouths. At eleven, a big shooting. Rained shots, that rumble; against veiled and deaf shots. Like our very feet is the combat: three bullets hitting the trunks enter heavy. "How beautiful is a shooting from afar!" Says the graceful boy from San Antonio - a boy. "It's more beautiful up close," says the old man ».

But the main interest rests, obviously, in everything he reveals about the relationship between the three great personalities of this war: Gómez, Maceo, Martí himself.

Martí flies high, he is above quarrels and intimate resentments. He recognizes the greatness of the work and places himself at the command of that great work.

April 28th:

I wake up to work. At 9 they line up, and Gómez, sincere and concise gives a speech: I speak, to the sun. And to work. That this strength remains tied in the united spirit: to fix, and order, the active and noble war: to open paths with the North: to quench any attempt, to disturb the war with promises ».

With Antonio Maceo the relationship is more complex. Writes on May 5th:

Come on, with all the strength. Suddenly, riders. Maceo, with a golden horse, in a gray Holland suit: the saddle is set in silver, graceful and with stars. He went out to look for us, because he has his men on the march: towards the

nearby sugar mill, to Mejorana, Maspon goes to have lunch ready for a hundred (...)

«I cannot untangle Maceo from the conversation:" but you stay with me or do you go with Gómez? " And he speaks to me, cutting off my words, as if I were the continuation of the legal government, and its representative ».

It must have been hard for José Martí to argue with Maceo, with the hero of so many battles, with the idol of thousands, the man whom he admired and respected, whom he knew was essential.

They defended two different conceptions of war. In La Mejorana the debate was rough. They did not agree. And both leaders had their reasons.

The meeting between Gómez, Maceo and Martí, at a certain moment, took place without witnesses. Ground for speculation.

Martí closes his notes for the day:

"And just like lying down, and sad ideas, we went to sleep."

The pages from May 6th were ripped off. Historians have not reached an agreement. Who ripped them off? What was its fate?

Some believe that it could have been Martí himself, in an exercise in contention. Putting anger aside before writing. Think with a clear head. Look with perspective.

A war is not a brotherly prank. There are small wars within a great war.

That was Martí's war. But also that of Gómez and Maceo. That of all worthy Cubans. Martí had to find a way.

On May 15th he writes, he is again the poet:

"The night rain, the mud, the bath in Contramaestre: the caress of the running water: the silk of the water."

And on the 17th, two days before his death, the diary closes. He closes it, not knowing that he is closing:

«And those who are coming tell me about Rosa Moreno, the widow farmer who sent Rabí her only son Melesio, 16 years old:" your father died there: I can't go anymore: you see. " They roast bananas, and mash cow steak, with a stone in the pylon, for the newcomers. The water from the river is muddy in Contramaestre the river overflow- and Valentin brings me a jar of sweet boiled fig leaves ».

No. Martí did not come to Cuba to be killed. He came to fight, to give his body and soul.

Death was the accident.

And with death, he became a star.

Beacon.

Light.