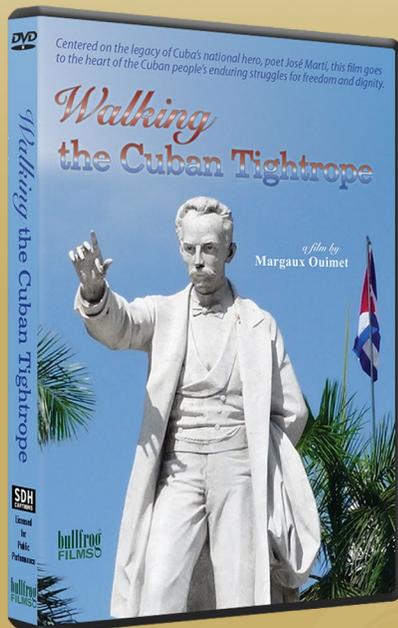


## *Walking* the Cuban Tightrope

Your screening of **WALKING THE CUBAN TIGHTROPE** can be used as a tool for educating your community about the legacy of Cuban nationalist and poet José Martí and his influence on contemporary Cuban society. This guide offers some background information, helpful tips & discussion questions for an informative, rewarding screening. **Good Luck!**

### what you'll find inside!

- about the film & filmmaker
- ready to watch! screening guide
- ready to talk! discussion guide
- resources handout



### About the film

**WALKING THE CUBAN TIGHTROPE** is a love poem to the Cuban people, to their artistic soul and their relentless struggle for freedom and dignity. From early childhood, Director Margaux Ouimet has had ties to Cuban family friends. In this film, four powerful and diverse protagonists take us on an engaging and troubling journey through Cuba's historical and present-day struggles, guided by the principles set out by national hero, poet and abolitionist, José Martí (1853-1895) - specifically in his essay "Mi raza / My race."

### About the filmmaker

Margaux Ouimet has worked in documentary film production for over 20 years. Born in Montreal, she began her career at the National Film Board of Canada where she was a producer and director for ten years. For more than a decade, Margaux Ouimet has been working in the private industry, often in co-production with the NFB. In 1999, *The Road from Kam-puchea*, produced by Margaux Ouimet, won Best Political Documentary and the VisionTV Humanitarian Award at Hot Docs International Festival. In 2003, *La Cueva Sola*, co-written and co-produced by Margaux Ouimet, won Best Canadian Documentary (medium length) at Hot Docs.



# ready to watch!

## Ideas and best practices to help make your community screening a success!

**1. Publicize Your Event!** This is the most important step because it not only tells the world what you're up to, but it lets the Bullfrog Community team know what your plans are so we can help you publicize your event. Visit <https://www.bullfrogcommunities.com/walkingthecubantightrope> to register and get the word out about your upcoming screening. You can also email us at [info@bullfrogcommunities.com](mailto:info@bullfrogcommunities.com) if you need help getting started!

**2. Visualize Your Goal!** What do you hope to achieve with your screening? Your goal could be to generate a lively post-film discussion about issues raised in the film, gain support or recruit volunteers for a local grassroots campaign, or raise funds for a group on your campus or in your community. Or, you can simply use the screening to provide an opportunity for your audience to watch and learn together.

**3. Where To Host?** Consider which locations in your area would be ideal for accommodating an in-person community film screening of the size you anticipate: downtown movie theaters, churches and synagogues, town halls, community centers, public libraries, school auditoriums, university and college venues, warehouse spaces, a local business, outdoor screenings at parks and playgrounds, and even private homes have been venues for many successful community screenings. Virtual screenings can be hosted on <https://streaming.bullfrogcommunities.com>, or by using a customized screening room on Vimeo.

**4. Find A Partner!** Give some thought to who is already working on this issue in your community. Can they help sponsor the event? Spread the word? Participate in a panel discussion or Zoom meeting after the screening? Some potential partners include: student groups at schools, universities and colleges; a local public or campus library; representatives from local religious congregations or faith-based community groups; local chapters of national/global activist or grassroots organizations; faculty members at nearby universities and colleges; reporters/journalists from local news publications such as newspapers and magazines; local nonprofits; and any community organizations that share goals or views with the film you are screening.

**5. Invite A Guest Speaker!** Guest speakers and panelists are a great way to encourage discussion and debate after a community screening. When people are engaged and thinking about the issues they will stay engaged long after the screening has passed. Contact representatives of local non-profits, faith groups, journalists and reporters from local media outlets, or teachers and professors who have expertise and/or insight into the issues raised by the film, and invite them to attend your screening—in person, via Skype or Zoom, etc—and participate in a discussion or Q&A session with your audience.

**6. Engage Your Audience!** Use this discussion guide to engage your audience. Included in this guide is a section called Ready to Talk! with a few suggested discussion questions to get the conversation started, and a section called Ready to Act!— which can be used as a handout — listing additional resources for further investigation about key issues raised in the film.

**7. Spread The Word!** Think about the best methods available to you for publicizing your film screening to people in your community. Sending emails to a contact list, creating event notifications on Facebook, Instagram, Eventbrite or an online community calendar, using Twitter to announce your event, and placing screening announcements in local newspapers and newsletters is a good start. In addition to this guide, you can download a screening poster and press photos that can be used to help publicize your event: <https://www.bullfrogcommunities.com/walkingthecubantightrope>

**8. Tell Us How It Went!** Visit <https://www.bullfrogcommunities.com/walkingthecubantightrope> to tell us about your event. Contribute to the film's discussion page (if available) to help other student groups, universities, non-profits, congregations and community groups further the discussion and put on successful screening events of their own. Where was your screening held? Who attended? What went well, and what was challenging? What did you discuss? Your feedback will help others to organize their own events, and will energize Bullfrog Communities as a whole.

# ready to talk!

Your audience will be excited to discuss the issues raised by the film.  
Here are some prompts that will get people talking.

1. **Prompt:** José Martí, national hero of Cuba

**Question:** Why is José Martí considered the national hero of Cuba?

José Martí (1853-1895) was a Cuban patriot, one of three leaders (José Martí, Antonio Maceo, Máximo Gómez) who organized and unified the movement for Cuba's independence from Spain. José Martí was a visionary political thinker and a Humanist philosopher who worked for an independent Cuba that was to be a democracy founded on racial and social equality. He died during the third War of Independence (1895-98), on his first day on the battlefield, at the age of 42. His heroic death as a martyr helped create the unquestioned myth of José Martí as Cuba's messiah, for all competing factions of Cuban nationalists. In Cuba and Latin America in general, José Martí was the foremost anti-imperialist thinker whose critiques of US-dominated corporate capitalism ring as persuasively today as they did at the time he wrote them (late 1880s - early 1890s).

2. **Prompt:** *Yo soy un hombre sincero / "I am an honest man"*. Opening lyrics of *Guantanamera*, from *Versos sencillos/Simple Verses* written by José Martí in 1887.

**Question:** Why was it important for Martí to identify himself as an honest man?

José Martí and other modernist artists were driven by a thirst for authenticity, as an act of rebellion to liberate the stifling norms of his time. Martí was distinguished for his prose and deceptively simple, sincere verse on themes of personal freedom and united Americas. In the context of the staggering industrialization and false social progress in the US, and in opposition to the rigid social norms of the Spanish colonial elites, Martí wrote: "Cuba's Destiny will be rooted in collective truth and liberty, the ultimate authenticity."

3. **Prompt:** The Cuban school girl and the US President

**Question:** What does the school girl refer to when she says "America"?

For Martí, America does not belong just to the United-States of America. Cubans are Americans, just as are Peruvians, Mexicans, Canadians and all the others who live in the hemisphere. Martí's project of hemispheric popular solidarity embraced all of Latin-America, Puerto Rico, North-America and the Caribbean islands, and their 1 billion inhabitants. A bearer of universal ideas of emancipation, Martí laid the foundations of national unity against the US, while advocating a great pan-Latin-American union that would realize Bolívar's dream of the "Great Homeland". President Obama underlines common points in the heritage of the peoples of Cuba and the US, the history that Cuba and the US share. What of their future will Cuba and

the US share? How will Cuba and the US overcome the “habitual hostility” that has existed for several long centuries and continues today? The embargo remains hostage to political ambitions in the important electoral state of Florida, home to so many Cuban exiles who retain their claim to José Martí’s true legacy and their hatred of the Castro revolution, harbouring eternal dreams of drawing Cuba once again into the embrace of its mighty American neighbour.

4. **Prompt:** Martí’s apparent contradictions:

**Question:** Was José Martí a selfless idealist or a ruthless strategist?

It is impossible to pigeonhole Martí into convenient categories. He was both a Humanist and a political revolutionary. As a Humanist, Martí worked for the moral gain and mutual progress of all. As a political strategist, he needed rich and poor, Black and White to support and to fight in his “necessary” war for an independent Cuba, a Cuba that he promised would be “by all and for all”. Was he for “the poor people of this world”, or was he for being “prosperous” as a way to succeed and be generous? “To be educated is the only way to be free” is a widely known aphorism of José Martí’s. “To be prosperous is the best way to be generous.” is rarely seen or heard, as it has been occulted by the Castro Revolution. When he first moved to New York (1880), Martí admired the dynamic entrepreneurship of the US. He wrote poetically of the building of the Brooklyn Bridge. However, after living “in the belly of the beast” for almost a decade, he began to write about the ugly underbelly of that beast: “Excessive love of wealth gnaws at their intestines like a worm.” “Americans choose to be ignorant of the suffering that surrounds them. They prefer being surrounded by luxury, even if it is false.”

5. **Prompt:** IMAGE: “Lagrimas negras / Black Tears”, a portrait of José Martí as a Black man

**Question:** Was José Martí racially blind?

In the film, the artist Erik Oliveira Rubio paints a portrait of José Martí as a Black man as a powerful tribute to Martí’s anti-racist fight for the abolition of slavery. From childhood, Martí was devastated by the suffering of slaves that he witnessed. (cf. poetry) Context is key. Martí was a man of his time, influenced by the principles of European of Universal Humanism. We can say that Martí’s form of nationalism was inclusionary but also racially blind. White Cubans and Black Cubans fought together for Cuban independence. Martí extolled this vision of a Cuban nationality built on a foundation of racial and social equality and he thought of that as a gift to the world. He didn’t just think about it as a Cuban future he thought it could be a model for the world. Martí’s legacy in terms of race: “Cubans are more than Black and White” has never, in fact, reflected the lived reality of Black Cubans. It has been used as a proud patriotic notion to bring to bring all Cubans together in Martí’s and Maceo’s war for Independence in 1895, and today it is used to stifle debate and discourse. The Castro Revolution claims to have solved the problem of race in Cuba. To contradict this in any way is to risk being accused of treason.

6. **Prompt:** José Martí, the Universal Cuban

**Question:** Why is José Martí considered “the most universal of all Cubans”?

From the outset, this film establishes Martí as a complete human being: a man of heart and reason. An artist. Through his great sensitivity, he perceives transformation from dense matter to electromagnetic light waves, or to the illumination of the spirit. A thinker who transcended the boundaries of ideologies and politics to seek social justice and freedom for the oppressed of the world, José Martí “contains multitudes”. As a Humanist, José Martí’s nationalism stood up for universal values developed in Enlightenment-era European contexts. But Martí applied them specifically to the Americas, - against Spanish, Portuguese and US colonial imposition, - and against the belief of his time in the “natural” superiority of the white race. Martí’s influence has endured and may be said to embody a message for people of all nations and cultures today. As we see in *Walking the Cuban Tightrope*, Martí is still the #1 cultural reference, the Cuban Everyman, depicted by artists in popular culture and in the expressions of everyday people.

7. **Prompt:** Cuba’s Destiny is yet to be fulfilled.

**Question:** How will Cuba’s destiny be fulfilled, and what will it look like?

Lillian Guerra partially answers this question in the film. She elaborated on that elusive destiny in a Zoom interview that is not in the film and that reflects José Martí’s uncompromising ideals: “The Destiny that has yet to be fulfilled is really the aspiration that Cubans have to not just simply have a democratic society and a socially just society and a socially just economy. They have aspirations for Cuba to be the most democratic, the most socially just society in the world! Blacks were at the head of those Independence wars. They were the majority of the troops. They were almost half of the leadership corps and effectively, they reflected this notion that was so unusual at that time, really truly radical at that time, of total change, leaving behind 400 years of plantation and slavery and colonialism for a completely different version of human reality. So, Cubans still aspire to that. That’s why we are so obsessed with José Martí and Antonio Maceo and our past and fighting the silencing of History because we believe that we will create this society so long as we continue to aspire to it.”

# resources

## **Cuban Studies at the University of Florida** — <https://cubanstudies.history.ufl.edu/>

Visit this site to learn about and experience Cuba through visual galleries of unique historical photographs and photo essays, filmed oral interviews, and links to specially selected treasures from UF's vast library collections and private archives on Cuba.

## **Timeline of U.S. - Cuba Relations** — <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-cuba-relations>

Since Fidel Castro's ascent to power in 1959, U.S.-Cuba ties have endured a nuclear crisis, a long U.S. economic embargo, and persistent political hostilities. The diplomatic relationship thawed under President Barack Obama, but many restrictions have since been renewed.

## **Guantanamo: A Poem and a Song**

<https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/resources-for-educators/classroom-resources/lessons-and-activities/lessons/9-12/guantanamera-a-poem-and-a-song/>

Participants will research and analyze the famous Cuban folk song, "Guantanamo." The song was made famous by Pete Seeger with lyrics from a poem by José Martí, and draw comparisons between the artists and discover the revolutionary history shared by the two men.

## **Cuban Research Institute** — <https://cri.fiu.edu/>

The Cuban Research Institute (CRI) at Florida International University (FIU) encourages original research and interdisciplinary teaching, organizes extracurricular activities, collaborates with other academic units working in Cuban and Cuban American studies, and promotes the development of library holdings and collections on Cuba and its diaspora.

## **Ramses Morales Izquierdo, Creator** — <https://www.ramsesdrawing.com/>

Website dedicated to the artistic works of award-winning Cuban editorial cartoonist and illustrator Ramses Morales Izquierdo.

## **Translating Cuba** — <https://translatingcuba.com/>

A compilation of translations of Cuban bloggers, independent journalists and human rights activists, primarily writing from the island.