

Lola Rodríguez de Tío

(1843-1924) is a revered figure in both Cuban and Puerto Rican history. She is Puerto Rico's premier nineteenth century lyric poet and one of Latin America's most important early feminists. She was born in the town of San German, Puerto Rico. Born into the island's ruling class, she was the daughter of Don Sebastian Rodríguez de Astudillo, Dean of the Magistracy of Puerto Rico, and Doña Carmen Ponce de León, a descendant of Ponce de León, the explorer and first governor of the colony. She was a bright child who showed early promise as a poet. Her education in religious schools and by private tutors was guided by her mother, "an educated, well-read woman with a fine spirit and the wide-awake intelligence of a child." It was rare for women to be educated in Puerto Rico; most women, especially poor women, were illiterate. It was rarer still for a woman to be an intellectual, but Rodríguez de Tío was supported and encouraged in her progress as a poet-by-poet Ursula Cardona de Quinones. Her understanding of the disparity of opportunity for women made her one of Latin America's most influential early feminists.

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The work for which Rodríguez de Tío is best known, and which caused her to be deported, was "La Borinqueña." In 1868, she composed a fiery lyric for a traditional melody; she read it aloud at a literary gathering at her home to immediate acclaim. It begins: "Awake, Borinqueños, for they've given the signal! /Awake from your sleep, for it's time to fight!" "La Borinquena" became Puerto Rico's national anthem, but Rodríguez de Tío's lyrics were later replaced with the more sentimental lyrics of Manuel Fernández Juncos. The Lares Uprising of 1868 brought about a repressive response from the government— Rodríguez de Tío and her husband were given hours to leave the island. They went into exile in Venezuela, where they met Hostos. Hostos became very close to them and their teacher. (Hostos wrote many essays on social science topics, such as psychology, logic, literature, and law, and is considered one of the first systematic sociologists in Latin America. He was also known to be a supporter of women's rights and abolishing slavery.)

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Finally, the family was allowed to return to Puerto Rico in 1885, but once again, Rodríguez de Tío's writing infuriated the government. "Nochebuena," a tribute to political prisoners, was published in 1887, the "terrible year" of the "Comparte." Rodríguez de Tío and her family were exiled in 1889 to Cuba, never again to live in Puerto Rico. However, she devoted the rest of her life to achieving independence for both her homeland and Cuba. She met Martí in 1892; Martí considered her as an equal in the arts and politics. She earned many recognitions in Cuba, Latin America, and the world for her writings. She is buried in Havana's Cementerio Colon with the expectation that when Puerto Rico is free, she will be buried in the family's pantheon in Puerto Rico.