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**"José Mesón Acosta." Dictionary of Caribbean and Afro-Latin American Biography, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Franklin K. Knight. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.**

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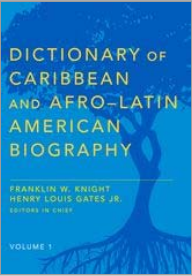
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## Oxford Reference



**Dictionary of Caribbean and Afro-Latin American Biography**  
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### Mesón Acosta, José (1927?–1959), revolutionary, military leader, and machinist,

was born, probably in 1927, into a family of African descent in the southeastern Dominican Republic province of Barahona. As a young man Mesón left the Dominican Republic and traveled to New York, where he met his eventual wife with whom he fathered two children, Juan Miguel Mesón and Darlene Mesón Holmes. Prior to his arrival in New York, Mesón served as a sergeant in the Dominican navy.

In the Dominican Republic, Mesón served the Dominican government in various capacities, including during the dictatorship of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina, and in the process he gained the trust of the Trujillo family. In addition to his military service, he worked as a bodyguard for Ramfis Trujillo, son of the dictator, and also as a machinist for some of Trujillo's boats, including his personal yacht, the *Angelita*, named after the dictator's daughter. Working for the government, Mesón witnessed many of the atrocities committed by Trujillo and those who served his dictatorship.

Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina ruled the Dominican Republic with an iron fist for nearly thirty-one years. He had trained under the US Marines during the United States' occupation of the Caribbean nation after World War I. From 1930 through 1961, different men served as the official president of the Dominican Republic, including Jacinto Peynado, Joaquín Balaguer, and Trujillo's brother Héctor. But during these presidencies, it was Rafael Trujillo who, in fact, ruled the nation. He and his family took ownership of most businesses in the Dominican Republic. The dictatorship murdered numerous people, and in 1937 it was responsible for the systematic killing of thousands of people of Haitian ancestry alongside the border of the Dominican Republic and Haiti. US forces disarmed the civilian population in the Dominican Republic during the occupation of 1916–1924, and Trujillo's dictatorship continued this trend of disarmament, with his control extending beyond Dominican soil. Trujillo was indeed accused of several murders outside the country, including the deaths of former Columbia University professor of Spanish ancestry Jesús de Galíndez and US pilot Gerald Lester Murphy, and the attempted murder of Venezuelan president Rómulo Betancourt.

While serving as bodyguard to Ramfis Trujillo, Mesón witnessed firsthand many of the crimes committed against the Dominican people. During the numerous sea voyages onboard the luxurious boats of the Trujillos, Mesón observed the abuse Ramfis and his friends regularly meted out to women. After witnessing several such incidents, Mesón decided to remain behind in New York City during a visit on which he had accompanied Ramfis.

In New York, Mesón connected with other people who opposed the dictatorship. In 1958 he joined a group of anti-Trujillistas led by Manuel Batista Clisante, who intended to liberate the Dominican Republic from the dictatorship by launching an armed offensive from Miami. However, this plan was abandoned once the plot was uncovered on 29 July 1958. Though the plot was dismantled, Mesón and his revolutionary colleagues did not allow this to deter them from their mission. The Cuban Revolution inspired them. After their original plan was foiled, they went to train in Havana, Cuba, where they joined forces with the Movimiento de la Liberación Dominicana (Dominican Liberation Movement). With the support of Fidel Castro, the Movimiento founded the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army). The revolutionaries trained for this mission were scheduled to arrive in three different Dominican locations: Constanza in the province of La Vega, and Maimón and Estero Hondo in the province of Puerto Plata. Although the expedition to Constanza, Maimón, and Estero Hondo was planned for 14 June 1959, only the aerial attack took place on schedule. As the result of sabotage and inclement weather, the two boats involved in the expedition did not disembark on Dominican soil until several days later.

On 20 June 1959 the boat *Carmen Elsa*, commanded by José Horacio Rodríguez and later captained by Mesón, disembarked in Maimón with ninety-six revolutionaries. During the voyage from Cuba to the Dominican Republic, the *Carmen Elsa* began to sink, presumably as a result of sabotage. However, a quick-thinking Mesón fixed the ship's rudder and led his fellow revolutionaries to safety. Upon arrival, they met heavy resistance from the Dominican military, including the navy and coast guard; they were also bombarded by air. Mesón was injured and captured by Trujillo's forces. The participants in this expedition would come to be known as the heroes of the 14th of June Movement.

Once captured, Mesón was taken to San Isidro Aerial Base and afterward to La 40, a prison reserved for the regime's most detested enemies. Prisoners of La 40 were tortured, deprived of sleep, and stripped naked, among other practices. Some of Mesón's colleagues were quickly killed after capture, but because he had served the Dominican military for many years and was labeled a traitor by Ramfis, Trujillo's forces ensured that Mesón was brutally tortured: he was castrated and electrocuted. Trujillo's forces also dismembered his body. Possibly the most recognizable image of any member of the 14th of June Movement was that of Mesón being electrocuted in an electric chair.

There were many men and women who opposed Trujillo's violent dictatorship and who in the process lost their lives. José Mesón Acosta was one of those heroes.

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