

Although Cuba gained independence following a United States victory over Spain, Cuban patriots had been struggling for many years. Their hero was the poet and journalist Jose Martí (1853–1895). Martí spent many years as a writer in the United States, observing the country (“The Other America”) for his readers in Latin America and the Caribbean (“Our America”). Early in 1895 he returned to fight in Cuba and was killed in battle. The excerpt below is from his 1891 essay called “Our America.” ♦ *As you read, notice what Martí believes the people of Spanish America must do. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

Jose Martí's “Our America”

... America is escaping all its dangers. The octopus [colonial rule] still sleeps on some republics; but others, in contrast, drain the ocean from their lands with a furious, sublime haste, as if to make up for lost centuries. Some, forgetting that Juárez [Mexico's reform leader] rode in a mule-drawn coach, hitch their coach to the wind and entrust the reins to a soap bubble; poisonous luxury, the enemy of liberty, corrupts the frivolous and opens the door to the outlander. In others, where independence is threatened, an epic spirit produces a heightened manliness. Still others spawn a rabble-in-arms in rapacious wars against their neighbors which may yet turn and devour them.

But there is yet another danger which does not come from within, but from the difference in origins, methods and interests between the two halves of the continent. The hour is fast approaching when our America will be confronted by an enterprising and energetic nation seeking close relations, but with indifference and scorn for us and

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our ways. And since strong countries, self-made by the rifle and the law, love and love only strong countries. . . the pressing need for our America is to show herself as she is, one in soul and purpose, swift conqueror of a suffocating tradition. . . . The scorn of our formidable neighbor, who does not know us, is the greatest danger for our America; and it is imperative that our neighbor know us, and know us soon, so she shall not scorn us, for the day of the visit is at hand. Through ignorance, she might go so far as to lay hands on us. From respect, once she came to know us, she would remove her hands. One must have faith in the best in men and distrust the worst. If not, the worst prevails. Nations should have a pillory [punishment] for whoever fans [encourages] useless hates; and another for whoever does not tell them the truth in time.

Source: Excerpt from *The America of Jose Martí*, trans. Juan de Onis. Translation copyright © 1954, renewed 1982 by Farrar, Straus & Giroux, LLC. Reprinted by permission of Farrar, Straus & Giroux, LLC.

Questions to Think About

1. What problems does Martí say are occurring in various Spanish American republics?
2. Besides the dangers the Spanish American republics face from within, what does Martí see as the main danger from outside? What does he see as the cause of this danger?
3. **Recognizing Ideologies** From this excerpt, what do you think were Martí's feelings toward the United States? Good? Hostile? Mixed? Explain.
4. **Activity** From an encyclopedia or other source, make a time line of events in the Cuban struggle for independence from the 1860s to the early 1900s. List some heroes besides Jose Martí.