Martí, José

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(hōsā' mär'tē'), 1853–95, Cuban essayist, poet, and patriot, leader of the Cuban struggle for independence. One of the greatest prose writers of Spanish America, he is noted for his fluent style and vivid imagery. In Nuestra América (1891) and other essays he brilliantly analyzed the sociopolitical problems of Latin America. As a poet he wrote the famous Ismaelillo (1882), Versos libres (c.1882, pub. 1913), and a collection of exquisite lyrics, Versos sencillos (1891). His disregard for the stilted rhetoric of most 19th-century Spanish literature made him a precursor of the modernismo movement. Simultaneously a poet and a man of action, Martí led a life of heroic dedication to the cause of Cuban independence. At the age of 16 he was arrested and exiled. A long and arduous pilgrimage ensued during which he lived and worked in Mexico, Spain, Guatemala, Venezuela, and the United States, chiefly in New York City. He earned his living mostly by contributing articles (including some perceptive appraisals of literary, artistic, and political life in the United States) to South American newspapers and to the New York Sun. A great admirer of the United States, he nevertheless feared the effect of U.S. power and influence on the South American republics. During his last stay in the United States (1881–95) he founded the Cuban Revolutionary party and became the leading figure of the liberation movement. A major tragedy at the commencement of the final insurrection against Spain was his untimely death at the battle of Dos Ríos in May, 1895.

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