

2007

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## Recommended Citation

Boggs, Jon, "Spanish-American War Causes and Consequences" (2007). *Master of Liberal Studies Research Papers*. 18.  
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Jon Boggs

March 15, 2007

## **Spanish-American War Causes and Consequences**

### *Introduction*

In 1898 the United States went to war with Spain. The U.S.'s primary motivating issue was Cuban independence; however, far more than altruistic foreign policy interest motivated the United States to intervene in the struggle between the Spanish government and Cuban revolutionaries. Most historical accounts of the Spanish-American war offer similar analyses of the key causes of the conflict: poor treatment of Cubans in reconcentration camps by the Spanish, "yellow journalism", protection of U.S. economic interests, expansionistic minded politicians, Spanish disrespect of U.S. President McKinley and the sinking of the U.S.S. *Maine*. A combination of all of these factors ultimately resulted in the United States going to war with Spain but the most influential factor to the U.S. public was the sinking of the U.S.S. *Maine*. Nothing motivates the U.S. citizenry to support a war more than retaliation for a direct attack on the U.S. (e.g. the bombing of Pearl Harbor followed by a declaration of war). The perception of a deliberate attack on the *Maine* pushed the United States to war. Whether an internal cause or an exterior cause was the reason the *Maine* exploded is still disputed. There is no evidence that Spain had a hand in the explosions but Spain was blamed by the U.S. public. The U.S. reaction of initiating a war could be labeled, irrational or emotional. Most evidence suggests that this is primarily why there was a war between the United States and Spain. Public pressure in the U.S. to avenge the *Maine* ("Remember the

Maine”) forced the U.S. government into a war with Spain without a clear rationale; instead, it was simply an emotional response. The United States won the war easily and emerged as a major force in the world. Spain continued its decline as a world power losing Cuba, the Philippines, Puerto Rico and Guam to the United States. The war educated the United States in military organizational mistakes, health problems and leadership issues to ensure the military was better prepared for future conflicts. Unfortunately, the nearly effortless victory (at least from the American perspective) seemed to give war a good name.

## **Causes**

### *Cuban Revolutionary Activity*

The roots of Spanish American War go back as far as 1868. Cuba was a long-time colony of Spain dating back to Columbus’s first voyage in 1492. It was an often-neglected colony until it experienced a huge economic boom, starting in the late 1700s. The economic boom was a result of expansion and diversification of trade and the introduction of large-scale sugar production. Another significant contributor to Cuba’s economic emergence was its increasing economic ties with the United States. Cuban landowners came to see Spain’s role in their economy as problematic.<sup>1</sup> The Spanish Government was viewed as weak and this perception influenced Cuban landowners to believe that their relationship (mother country/colony) with Spain was severely limiting economic development in Cuba. In 1868, enough resentment toward Spain existed among the landowners to provoke a revolution. Authors Walter LaFeber, Richard

Polenberg and Nancy Woloch of *The American Century* succinctly describe the roots of the Cuban revolution and increasing American interest in the island: “Since 1868 Cubans had revolted against the domination, corruption, and efficiency of their Spanish rulers. The United States had barely avoided involvement during the 1870s.”<sup>2</sup>

The first revolution lasted 10 years and ended with the signing of the Treaty of Zanjón, preserving Spain’s sovereignty in Cuba.<sup>3</sup> Not only did the Cubans lose the fight, the land-holding Creole elite was decimated, which opened the door for increased U.S. control (private business, not government control) over Cuban industries through U.S. investment.<sup>4</sup> Although the U.S. had some interests in Cuba in the late 1800s (mostly an economic interest), it wasn’t until an uprising in 1895 that Cuba grabbed the attention of the United State’s government and people.

A worldwide depression in 1894 helped to revive the Cuban revolution. Cuba was heavily dependent upon the U.S. as a market for its sugar and a high tariff imposed by the U.S. on sugar imports was devastating to the Cuban economy. Dire economic straits renewed interests in Cuban independence from Spain (presumably to assert more control of their economic realm but it also fed the revolutionary fire). The revolutionary spirit of the first revolt had never died; it was only in exile. “The Spiritual, intellectual, and organizational leader of the revolutionary movement was Jose Marti....”<sup>5</sup> Marti was the leader of the first Cuban Revolution who was arrested and imprisoned by the Spanish government and later exiled to the United States in 1871. He never gave up the fight. While in the U.S., he continued to work toward a goal of Cuban independence. By 1895, enough support existed in Cuba to oust Spain and Marti again led the way. He was joined in the fight by heroes of the Ten Years’ War, Maximo Gomez (Commander-in

Chief of the revolutionary army) and Antonio Maceo (fabled black warrior). Another important revolutionary leader was Estrada Palma (former President of the Cuban Republic). Author of *The War with Spain in 1898*, David Trask, links the beginning of the Cuban Revolution in 1895 to U.S. preoccupation in the island. “On February 25, 1895, a group of dissidents in eastern Cuba uttered the *grito de Baire* (“cry of Baire”) to signal the start of an armed uprising against Spanish authority. Soon thereafter hostilities commenced, and Spain proved unable to put down the rebellion. As time passed, two Presidents of the United States, the Democrat Grover Cleveland and the Republican William McKinley, became increasingly preoccupied with Cuban matters.”<sup>6</sup> Marti was killed early in the 1895 revolution and martyred as the fight continued. The revolution for independence stirred a change of events that eventually lead to U.S. intervention in the form of the Spanish-American War.

### *Economic Factors*

Initial U.S. interest in Cuba was largely based on economics. Trade with and investment in Cuban businesses steadily progressed over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By 1895 most estimates state U.S. investment in Cuba was between \$30 and \$50 million dollars and trade was at about \$100 million a year. One would assume that disruption of trade and investment in Cuba coupled with destruction of property would prompt strong pressure from the U.S. business community on the U.S. government to fix the Cuba’s instability problem. However, as evidenced by assessments by most authors on the topic, there was no clear consensus that war was justified (based on the value of investment) as an answer to the situation in Cuba. Don Mabry, author of the *Historical Text Archive*,

believes the business community was opposed to war. “US economic interests were not much even by the standards of the day. In 1895, US-Cuban trade was about \$100 million a year. U.S. investment in Cuba was about \$50 million, mostly in sugar and iron but some in mining and tobacco. Some thought only \$30 million. Neither was high enough to justify intervention (except, of course, if it were your money). The U.S. business community was generally opposed the intervention.”<sup>7</sup>

As the insurrection progressed, destruction of U.S. owned property increased in Cuba and trade continued to be disrupted, business leaders were very concerned and did begin to make more noise for the U.S. government to take action. However, there was no consensus on what action to take. Shipping firms pressed the U.S. government to pressure Spain to restore peace so Cuban-American trade could be reestablished at its previous level. Some U.S. investors in sugar cane plantations, mills, etc. were upset with the damage caused by Cuban revolutionary arsonists and wanted Spain to take a stronger role in protecting their property.<sup>8</sup> Whether it be pressure or cooperation with Spain the U.S. business community wanted something done to restore peace on the island of Cuba.

U.S. investment and trade with Cuba was not enough – on its own - to rationalize U.S. intervention in Cuban affairs with Spain. Clearly there was concern among the U.S. business community about the situation in Cuba and some pressure was put on the U.S. government but not an overwhelming amount. Economics - alone - was not a cause of U.S. intervention in Cuba. However, if there had been no or little U.S. trade with and investment in Cuba, U.S. involvement at any level in Cuba would have been very difficult to justify.

*Expansion/Imperialism*

Although arguably not the prevailing attitude in Washington D.C., expansionistic/imperialistic attitudes within the U.S. government played a pertinent role in U.S. intervention in Cuba. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century expansion was a persistent theme in U.S. history (Louisiana Purchase, Mexican Cession, purchase of Alaska, etc.). Although most U.S. territorial acquisitions were limited to the continent of North America, there were territorial prospects beyond continental borders: Virgin Islands, British Columbia and Cuba. In fact, the U.S. government attempted to purchase Cuba multiple times, starting with President Polk in 1848.<sup>9</sup> U.S. expansion was not a driving force at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century but it continued to be an underlying current in U.S. policy (displaying additional imperialistic characteristics). Leading this new imperialistic movement were John Hay (secretary of state under McKinley and Roosevelt), Alfred Mayhan (Naval officer and noted author), Elihu Root (Secretary of War under McKinley and Roosevelt), Henry Cabot Lodge (Senator from Massachusetts) and Theodore Roosevelt (Assistant Secretary of the Navy and vice-President under McKinley, 26<sup>th</sup> President of the United States). John Hay did not become Secretary of State until the Spanish American War was already underway, thereby nullifying his responsibility in pushing for U.S. intervention in Cuba. However, Hay clearly has a role in pursuing imperialistic policies after the war. Elihu Root's influence came after commencement of the war as well. Like Hay, Root's imperialistic attitudes were more publicly acknowledged once he occupied an influential government position in 1899, Secretary of War.<sup>10</sup>

Mayhan's influence was based largely on the philosophy he put forth in his book, *The Influence of Sea Power on History*, in which he asserted that a strong nation must be a strong-sea power (requiring great commerce and a great navy). To be an effective navy

required control over foreign territory because a military power needs bases for its navy. Clearly, Mayhan advocated imperialism as necessary for a country to protect commerce via the navy and thereby become a great nation. Although Mayhan was not literally in the ear of U.S. leaders advocating intervention in Cuba or other places, his philosophy became doctrine in the U.S. Navy and undoubtedly influenced imperialistic attitudes in the U.S.<sup>11</sup>

Many of Mayhan's philosophies were channeled through Theodore Roosevelt. As assistant Secretary of the Navy, "TR's top priority was expelling Spain from the Americas..."<sup>12</sup>. According to author Warren Zimmerman, Roosevelt had two principles that guided his term in the Department of Navy. "First, he believed that the spread of the more advanced peoples (preferably English-speaking) over the less advanced benefited mankind as a whole. Second, he maintained that when American interests clashed with those of another state, the former had to be defended."<sup>13</sup> Zimmerman continues his assessment of Roosevelt as an imperialist and his desire to have the U.S. intervene in Cuba, "Even before he came into positions of policy responsibility, he would sit in the Metropolitan Club with his allies Mahan and Lodge and plan ways for the United States to wrest the imperial baton from ineffectual, corrupt, unworthy Spain. Long before he became president, Roosevelt was the most influential advocate of America's new imperialism."<sup>14</sup>

Henry Cabot Lodge was possibly the closest thing to a co-conspirator in the new imperialist movement. His words and actions as demonstrated by an excerpt from a speech he gave to the U.S. Congress advocating U.S. intervention in Cuba.

Recognition of belligerency as an expression of sympathy is all very well. I think it is fully justified by the facts in Cuba, but I should like to see some more positive action taken than that. I think we cannot escape the responsibility which is so near to us. We cannot shrug our shoulders and pass by on the other side. If that war goes on in Cuba, with the added horrors which this new general brings with him, the responsibility is on us; we cannot escape it. We should exert every influence of the United States. Standing, as I believe the United States stands for humanity and civilization, we should exercise every influence of our great country to put a stop to that war which is now raging in Cuba and give to that island once more peace, liberty, and independence.<sup>15</sup>

Lodge and Roosevelt were arguably the most adamant and influential promoters of imperialism but as expressed in Lodge's speech, they used moral arguments to pursue others. Part of their rationale for holding imperialistic attitudes was their belief that it was the destiny and responsibility of United States as a great nation to spread democratic ideals and culture. Part of the spreading of American culture included spreading Christianity. Roosevelt, like many others, was influenced by the work of Josiah Strong, a Congregationalist minister. Strong thought it was the moral duty of the United States to promote both civil liberty and Christianity across the globe and said so in his most important piece of writing, *Our Country*. "It is not necessary to argue to those for whom I write that the two great needs of mankind, that all men maybe lifted up into the light of the highest Christian civilization, are, first, a pure, spiritual Christianity, and, second, civil liberty."<sup>16</sup> Latin America was one part of the world Smith specifically mentions Christianizing. Clearly, Cuba was of interest to the many in the U.S. for its economic value (commerce & investment), its potential as a place to share democratic ideals and promote the advancement of Christianity.

### *Spanish Reconcentration Policy*

To counter the success of the Cuban rebels (Mambises) were enjoying during the Revolution of 1895, Spain replaced General Aresnio Martinez de Campos with General Valeriano Weyler in 1896. This was perhaps the single most significant leadership change during the entire episode. Weyler eventually became known as “Butcher” because of the brutal tactics he employed. The Spanish had been unsuccessful at hunting down and defeating the rebels in the field prior the Weyler’s appointment. Weyler was chosen to institute a long-term reconcentration strategy. It called for forcing reconcentrados, Cuban peasants, to emigrate from their rural dwellings to cities and towns that were controlled by Spanish Military garrisons.<sup>17</sup> David Trask points out that this strategy served multiple purposes: “Above all, the practice would deprive the insurgents of subsistence and ammunition. It would also restrict their access to replenish the guerrilla bands. Since reconcentration jeopardized the well being of civilians, Cubans in the field would worry about loved ones in the zones of the reconcentration. Weyler believed that reconcentration also would lower the casualties of his force.”<sup>18</sup> What Weyler could not foresee in his strategy were the horrific results of the reconcentration camps and strong reaction to the camps from the world, particularly the United States. Weyler had villages burned, livestock killed and fields destroyed as the peasants made their way to the camps. The conditions of the camps were deplorable; Spain failed to provide adequate provisions, which resulted in malnutrition, disease and ultimately large numbers of deaths. Exaggerated death tolls estimated approximately 400,000 deaths in the camps. A more conservative and likely more accurate number is around 100,000 deaths, horrific enough to raise major concerns about the immorality of the Spanish government.<sup>19</sup> What really caught the attention of Americans is the fact that the number

represents civilian deaths, not soldiers killed in battle. The brutal atrocities committed by Weyler and the Spanish during the reconcentration campaign would not be ignored by the U.S. (both the government and the citizenry). Journalists made sure the stories of the atrocities were heard.

### *Yellow Press*

The role of the U.S. press in the years leading up to the Spanish-American war was unprecedented. It was the U.S. press that detailed the atrocities committed by the Spanish in reconcentration camps, magnified a Spanish insult of President McKinley and placed blame on Spain for the sinking of the *Maine*.

The style of writing during the era of the Spanish-American War was referred to as “yellow journalism.” The named originated from a competition involving cartoon drawings between the *New York Journal*, owned by William Randolph Hearst, and the *New York World*, owned by Joseph Pulitzer. Eventually, the term grew to refer to a sensationalist style of writing rooted in the competition to sell newspapers. Hearst and Pulitzer were two of the primary competitors but plenty of other newspapers practiced this type of journalism as well, such as the San Francisco Examiner.<sup>20</sup> “Some of the U.S. press, the “Yellow Press,” wrote sensationalistic stories, some with an element of truth and some completely false, which stirred emotions and encouraged bellicose sentiments.”<sup>21</sup>

An early focus of the U.S. press was the poor treatment of Cuban civilians in reconcentration camps. Newspapers offered headlines and published stories designed to elicit an emotional response from the their readers. It was Hearst’s *New York Journal*

that labeled General Weyler the “Butcher.” In January of 1897, the Journal produced a story featuring the title "Weyler throws nuns into prison. Butcher wages brutal warfare on helpless women."<sup>22</sup> Another Journal headline, this time from January 24, 1898 referred to Cuban babies falling victim to famine and labeled the conditions in Cuba as “Sights that Sicken Strong Men.”<sup>23</sup> Although yellow press did often report with accuracy about the conditions unfolding in Cuba, they exaggerated and sometimes printed complete lies:

The rising circulation rates of the Journal and other New York newspapers during this period of "jingoism" show that the drama made money, and the competition was too tight to throw the money away. Many papers lowered standards so much that they routinely carried news items directly off the pages of their rivals. Hearst, for example, caught Pulitzer's World in the act during the conflict that was to come. An article appeared in the Journal in July 1898 describing the death of Colonel Replie W. Thenuz, whose name was an anagram of the phrase, "We pilfer the news." The next day, Pulitzer's paper carried the item, being bold enough to add specific dateline information to make the story appear authentic. The Journal celebrated the gaffe for over a month while the World maintained a "pained silence" on its blunder.<sup>24</sup>

Not all of the press wrote sensationalistic stories. Most Midwestern newspapers printed stories and editorials maintained an accurate focus on U.S. interests in Cuba: economic imperialism, political idealism, military stratagems and humanitarianism.<sup>25</sup> However, the major newspapers (*Journal*, *World*, *Examiner*) found “yellow journalism” difficult to escape.

The “yellow press” clearly played a large role bringing attention to the conditions in Cuba. While most historians stop short of saying that the “yellow press” is the reason there was a war, its role in leading the U.S. towards war is well documented. The most famous story that cites the significance of the “yellow journalism” in months leading up to the war with Spain is the one in which William Randolph Hearst sent artist Frederick

Remington to Cuba. The purpose of the trip was for Remington to create pictures detailing the activity in Cuba. After spending some time in Cuba, Remington reportedly telegraphed Hearst informing him that essentially nothing was happening, “Everything is quiet. There is no trouble here. There will be no war. I wish to return. Remington.” To this Hearst is said to have responded, “Please remain. You furnish the pictures, and I’ll furnish the war. W.R. Hearst.”<sup>26</sup>. Historians have challenged the evidence that the correspondence between Remington and Hearst ever took place. However, the impact of the statements - particularly Hearst’s response - says a lot about the perceived power of the press around the time of the Spanish American War.

On February 9, 1898, the *New York Journal* published a private letter that had been stolen and brought to New York. In the letter, Spanish minister, Enrique Dupuy de Lôme insulted President McKinley, calling him “weak and catering to the rabble...”.<sup>27</sup> The “yellow press” took the story and ran. The headline of the *San Francisco Examiner* read, “Spain's Minister Insults The American President,” while the *New York Journal* referred to Dupuy de Lôme’s comments regarding President McKinley as, “The Worst Insult to the United States in its History.”<sup>28</sup> An already tense situation became more explosive as the American Public became further outraged, particularly with Spain.

### *Sinking of the Maine*

Undoubtedly, the U.S. press played a large role in pushing a war with Spain after the sinking of the USS *Maine*. President McKinley ordered the *Maine* to Cuba in January of 1898 to protect American property and interests. He was concerned with increased violence and riots in Cuba. On February 15, 1898 the *Maine* blew up in Havana Harbor.

Whether the Maine blew up because of an internal explosion (accidental) or external (possibly foul play) is still disputed. No official investigation found Spain guilty but the initial investigation by conducted by the U.S. Navy concluded that an external explosion set off the magazines in the ship.<sup>29</sup> This conclusion was all the U.S. press needed to blame Spain and dramatically increase pressure (via American public opinion) on the U.S. government to intervene in Cuba. Headlines like the following along with detailing stories helped to create the additional pressure: “DESTRUCTION OF THE WAR SHIP MAIN WAS THE WORK OF THE ENEMY!” (*New York Journal* on February 17, 1898) (PBS) and, “If There Was Treachery, Spain Must Do Battle,” (The *San Francisco Examiner*)<sup>30</sup> Even before the explosion of the *Maine*, campaigning for military intervention in Cuba had been picking up steam in Congress; Senator Redfield Proctor, who had visited and assessed the conditions in Cuba, made a convincing speech favoring U.S. military intervention in Cuba. His speech generated support from public, the business community and in the U.S. Congress.<sup>31</sup> John L. Offner in his article, *McKinley and the Spanish-American War*, describes how the combination of growing congressional and public support for war, along with the reaction to the sinking of the *Maine* (bolstered by the findings of a Naval court), was virtually impossible for McKinley to overcome:

The naval investigation concluded that the ship sank because an external explosion beneath the ship set off the magazines within the ship. The investigating officers did not know who was responsible for the external explosion. With the final report due to reach Washington in a week, McKinley began extensive consultations with cabinet officers and legislators of both political parties. Legislators, already inflamed by Proctor's speech and now apprised of the naval findings, strongly urged McKinley to use military force to end Spanish rule. McKinley attempted to dampen congressional outrage over the *Maine* and to channel their anger into a policy of intervention in Cuba for humanitarian reasons, but public release of the *Maine* report on March 28 fired

national indignation that supported congressional demands for immediate military intervention in Cuba.<sup>32</sup>

After the sinking of the *Maine* McKinley still sought a diplomatic solution and made stringent demands of Spain: end the reconcentration camp policies, propose an armistice to the Cuban rebels and allow the U.S. to be the final arbitrator between the two sides in conflict. The ultimate goal of the U.S. was to help Cuba gain independence, although it was never mentioned in the diplomatic demands.<sup>33</sup> Spain was unwilling to concede to all of the demands of the U.S. and the last attempt at diplomacy failed.

#### *Analysis of the Causes*

It is impossible to assess the causes and events leading up to the Spanish American War in isolation. They are all connected and play a part in the war between the United States and Spain in 1898. However, there are clearly certain factors that were more influential: Spanish reconcentration policy, the role of “yellow journalism” and the sinking of the *Maine*. These events all helped create a tremendous amount of political pressure on the U.S. government to address the situation in Cuba, limited the effectiveness of diplomacy, and ultimately pushed the U.S. into a war with Spain.

It is true that there was U.S. sympathy for Cubans in their early attempts at independence from Spain because Americans saw parallels between the American Revolutionary spirit of the 1770s and the Cuban revolution. However, the early insurrections in Cuba failed to inspire any serious thought of U.S. intervention. Although, they did create opportunities for increased economic activity with the U.S. and Cuba and made Americans aware of the Cuban plight. When the second insurrection

broke out in Cuba in 1895 there was a fair amount of U.S. investment in Cuba and trade with Cuba. Some claim that economic factors played a large role causing the war; the assumption is that the business world wanted to end the chaos in Cuba and gain a larger advantage with the elimination of Spain in the equation. The evidence suggests otherwise. Most business leaders were opposed to war because wars disrupt business. President McKinley received more pressure from the business world as war was looming but economic factors in isolation did not trigger the war.

The idea that American imperialism caused the war is overblown as well. Those with imperialistic tendencies (Roosevelt, Root, Lodge, etc.) were far more active in displaying those tendencies after the war than prior to it. The most powerful politicians (because of their position as commander in chief during the Cuban crisis), Presidents Cleveland and McKinley, were not imperialists and were very much against a war. The Teller Amendment, that basically says the U.S. had no intention of annexing Cuba, is a clear indicator that imperialistic policies were not in the forefront of American foreign policy prior to the Spanish American War.<sup>34</sup> The evidence suggests that imperialism played a large role in American foreign policy after the war and increased as Theodore Roosevelt and like-minded men assumed positions of increasing power (Vic-President, President). There is also insufficient evidence to suggest religion played an important role in U.S. intervention in Cuba. There were some, like Josiah Strong, that did want to spread the Christian faith around the globe but there was no substantial organized faith based movement to pursue a war with Spain.

None of the above mentioned reasons were direct causes of the Spanish American War but they hold significance in helping to create some background thinking in the

minds of many American politicians, businessmen and citizens. The background thinking was as follows: Cubans want independence; the U.S. would benefit economically from improved conditions in Cuba; the U.S. has a duty and the right to spread its democratic ideals and expand its influence across the globe; and the Cuban people are ripe for Christianization. These attitudes did not cause the war but made it easier to justify the war once a few more major events occurred.

The first of these events was the reconcentration policy conducted by Spain under General Weyler. No doubt that the horrendous treatment of the Cuban civilians created great concern among Americans. Also, there is no doubt that “yellow journalism” played a huge role in raising the American awareness of the conditions and arousing emotional responses to the situation. Both the American public and U.S. government became more concerned about Cuba with the establishment of reconcentration camps and this added to the justification for war but was still not enough to cause the war.

The interception and publication of the letter written Dupuy de Lôme’s insulting President McKinley stirred up more emotion but still no war. Ultimately, it was the real – or perceived – role of Spain in the sinking of the *Maine* that elicited a forceful emotional response from the American public. That emotional response pressured representatives in the U.S. Congress who pressured President McKinley toward war.

All evidence suggests that McKinley was desperate to avoid war but after the sinking of the *Maine* he couldn’t avoid war and maintain the support of the American public; he chose war. Some historians say emotionalism<sup>35</sup> caused the war or as David Trask describes the cause, “Irrational impulses rather than calculated strategic, economic, ideological, or religious considerations moved them to a great crusade in defense of *Cuba*

*libre.*”<sup>36</sup> The sinking of the *Maine* and its aftermath is the most direct cause of the war. The groundwork was laid for war but it was a states-wide emotional response to the injustices of the sinking of the *Maine* that resulted in the commencement of the war. “Yellow journalism” played an important role in stoking an emotional response but history tells us that Americans typically respond strongly to acts of aggression against the U.S. (Pearl Harbor, 9-11, etc.). The fact that Spain could have been responsible may have been enough to sway public opinion to war; overblown stories may have been unnecessary. Although the sinking of the *Maine* and the event’s aftermath are the most direct causes of the war, it is essential to consider all of the circumstances, background thinking, etc. to gain a complete understanding of why there was a Spanish American War.

### **Spanish American War Consequences**

The most immediate consequence of the Spanish-American War was territory changing hands. The treaty ending the Spanish American War, the Treaty of Paris, granted the U.S. ownership of Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Guam.<sup>37</sup> Territorial acquisition has historically been an indicator of national strength and clearly the United States emerged from this victory as a strong nation in the eyes of the world. However, territorial acquisition also has drawbacks. The U.S. experienced the benefits and downfalls of expansion following the Spanish-American War, and so did the inhabitants of the islands that were part of U.S. expansion.

Prior to the commencement of the Spanish American War the U.S. issued the Teller Amendment, basically stating that the United States would not annex Cuba after

the war. Although the U.S. was granted Cuba as part of the Treaty of Paris agreement, the U.S. did not officially annex Cuba: however, the U.S. did exercise a fair amount of control over Cuba for many years thereafter. The Platt Amendment was approved in May of 1903. It was a treaty between the U.S. and Cuba that gave the U.S. the right to intervene in Cuban affairs for the purpose of helping Cuba maintain its independence from foreign nations.<sup>38</sup> The Platt Amendment was not established purely for the benefit of the Cubans; the U.S. was given the right to buy or lease Cuban lands for military bases and coaling stations. Under the stipulations of the Platt Amendment, the U.S. sent troops to intervene in Cuba in 1906, 1909, 1912 and 1917-1922.<sup>39</sup> The Platt Amendment was repealed in 1934 but the U.S. retained its lease of Guantanamo Bay (Naval Base).<sup>40</sup> Clearly, gaining access to Cuban territory and establishing some control over Cuban affairs enhanced the strength of the U.S. but with increased access came greater responsibility in terms of U.S. military commitment to protect its interests.

Both Puerto Rico and Guam were acquired via the Treaty of Paris, unlike Cuba, the U.S. actually took control of these nations. Puerto Rico was a strategic gift to the U.S. in terms of military posts and an economic outlet. The U.S. military controlled the island until the Foraker Law in 1900. Since that time, the U.S. has gradually granted Puerto Rico more autonomy over domestic affairs; it took almost 50 years for self-government. Unfortunately for the islanders, the transition from Spanish to U.S. rule was not necessarily a positive step towards autonomy. The U.S. government actually took back some of the Spanish freedoms of Puerto Ricans. In the early years of U.S. rule, the colonial regime in Puerto Rico has been characterized as "...tactless, condescending mainlanders, who had no experience dealing with different cultures."<sup>41</sup> North American

companies took control of most of the sugarcane production as local landowners suffered more than prospered economically under U.S. control.<sup>42</sup> Today, Puerto Rico is a U.S. commonwealth having only domestic autonomy.

The situation in Guam was and is similar to Puerto Rico, particularly immediately after the war. The U.S. saw Guam as an important strategic location, mostly for military purposes and early U.S. rule often disregarded the natives of the island. In his article *Cruel Realities: The American Conquest of Guam*, Stephen Kinzer writes, “Americans ruled Guam with little consideration for its people. President McKinley decreed that the entire island would be considered a naval station, ruled by an officer with absolute power.”<sup>43</sup> Just like Puerto Rico, Guam was gradually given more local autonomy and U.S. rule was not exclusively oppressive and insensitive, infrastructure was improved, diseases decreased and the natives benefited and benefit from the protection of the U.S. military and the prosperity associated with having U.S. bases on the island. Guam remains strategically important to the U.S.: military communications and logistics, supporting anti-submarines and B-52 operations, nuclear weapons depots, etc.<sup>44</sup>

Worse than Guam and Puerto Rico, the transition from Spanish rule to U.S. rule in the Philippines was far from smooth, in fact it was extremely difficult. The Philippines gave the U.S. a base for commerce and military in the east but it came with heavy costs. The Filipinos wanted and expected their independence after the Spanish-American War. Led by Emilio Aguinaldo, the Filipinos fought U.S. rule in a brutal three-year insurrection. The U.S. was also thrust into Asian politics, which included dealing with the Japanese aggression. The Philippines was the sight of much military combat during World War II as the U.S. had to fight off Japanese occupation of the islands. The U.S.

finally granted the Philippines independence in 1946, a promise made in the Jones Act of 1916.<sup>45</sup>

While the acquisition of additional territories served as a tangible example of increased U.S. military and economic power, increased confidence and assertiveness, as a world power was an intangible but arguably a more important outcome of the Spanish-American war. U.S. Latin American foreign policy and to a lesser extent, foreign policy in Asia, exemplify the United State's unfolding emergence as a world power at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It only takes few examples to illustrate this growing emergence: Panama Canal, Big Stick Diplomacy, Dollar Diplomacy and Wilson's democracy in Latin America.

A clear example of the U.S. asserting influence in Latin America was its pursuit of having a canal build to connect the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean. It took the USS *Oregon* 67 days to sail around Cape Horn from San Francisco and finally reach Santiago Bay in Cuba, which dramatically increased support in the U.S. the building of a canal.<sup>46</sup> The fact that the U.S. ensured a successful Panamanian rebellion by sending warships to the coast of Columbia, financed and was responsible for the construction of the canal and operated the canal for almost a century speaks to a sense of entitlement the U.S. displayed in intervening in Latin America. President Theodore Roosevelt was instrumental in the success of the Panama Canal and also instrumental in expanding U.S. influence through Foreign Policy with his Big Stick diplomacy, which featured the Roosevelt Corollary. The Roosevelt Corollary essentially allowed for U.S. intervention in Latin America if necessary to mediate and quell conflicts with European Nations; the U.S. became an international police power.<sup>47</sup>

Although Roosevelt's successors, William Howard Taft and Woodrow Wilson, had different approaches to foreign policy, the results were basically the same: U.S. dominance in Latin American affairs. President Taft tried to keep Latin America stable through U.S. investment as advocated in his "Dollar Diplomacy" while President Wilson used the expansion of democratic ideals to justify U.S. paternal actions in Latin America. U.S. intervention in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was unprecedented. "From 1900 to 1917 American troops intervened in Cuba, Panama, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic Mexico and Haiti. American officials took over customs houses to control tariff revenues and thus governmental budgets; they renegotiated foreign debts with American banks; they trained national guards and ran elections."<sup>48</sup> U.S. intervention in Latin America continued throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century in places such as Guatemala and El Salvador. The roots of intervention are found at the close of the Spanish-American War when the U.S. emerged as a confident nation seeking to extend its control over foreign affairs in neighboring nations.

Spain was far from the world colonial power that thrived during the age of exploration when it engaged in war with the U.S. over Cuba. Losing the war and with it, territory (Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines) cemented the end of the Spanish Colonial Empire. The loss of the war was referred to as 'El diastre' in Spain, implying a huge blow to Spain. Spaniards tried to make sense of the loss and who to lay the blame on, military, government, etc. Clearly, losing colonial territory meant losing a cultural link with people that were viewed as Spaniards (like many Cubans) and losing the economic benefits of built-in trading partners. However, the loss forced Spain to become more introspective to solve internal problems such as education, efficient administration

and modernization of the economy. Intellectuals, artists and political parties worked to find solutions to the issues of the day in Spain.<sup>49</sup> In fact, many in Spain believed the loss of their empire was inevitable and war was simply a way to lose it with honor.<sup>50</sup> The loss to the United States in the Spanish American War was by no means pleasant but it forced Spain to try and reconcile domestic issues and seek a new status in the world.

There were many contributing factors that helped the United States gain confidence and the assertiveness necessary to be a major political player in the world. The U.S. government learned a great deal from the Spanish-American war in terms of military organization, training and medical advancements. All of these factors greatly improved the efficiency and effectiveness of the U.S. military, thereby playing a critical a role in shaping U.S. foreign policy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

It was clear from the beginning of the war that the U.S. military was ill prepared for the conflict. The organizational skills of the War Department were extremely poor. Troops did not get needed supplies in a timely manner (weapons, clothing, food). Some of the food given to soldiers was left over from the Civil War; therefore it spoiled and caused death and illness among the soldiers. It took seven weeks to get 17,000 soldiers to Cuba.<sup>51</sup> Soldiers were issued heavy woolen uniforms for a war in a tropical climate and African American soldiers faced racism.<sup>52</sup> Most of these problems were in the U.S. Army. A post-war evaluation of these problems led to significant changes for the better. As James Hammond Jr. puts it in his article *We are products of 1898*, “The Root Reforms of the Army were a direct result of the mobilization mess of 1898. Had these problems not occurred, no recognized need would have arisen to provide for an expandable, professional Army...”<sup>53</sup> Although the Navy fared better than the Army in

terms of military preparedness prior to the conflict, it also learned from its mistakes from the Spanish American war. A reflective assessment from the Department of Navy concluded, “The Spanish-American War proved to be an important learning experience for the U.S. Navy. When detailed official reports of the Battles of Manila Bay and Santiago de Cuba were analyzed, American naval leadership slowly accepted that its naval gunfire had performed badly.”<sup>54</sup> Assessment and steps for improvement were not a new military trends; it was the timing and results of the conflict that are particularly very significant. The U.S. won the war despite its organizational and other problems and set a course for military improvements that helped make it one the strongest countries in the world by the end of World War I in 1918.

The Spanish-America War also had an enormous impact on U.S. military medicine. Over 5,000 soldiers died during the conflict, the majority of them died because of disease, not combat. Sanitation was a primary reason for the transmission of disease and the U.S. Army was the primary culprit in lax sanitation practices as described by Vincent J. Cirillo in his article *Winged Sponges*:

Human waste disposal was a prodigious problem in the U.S. Army camps during the Spanish-American War (Straight 1986). The 60,000 men stationed at Camp Thomas produced an average of 18,800 pounds of feces and 21,000 gallons of urine per day (Ha[r]vard 1909, p. 330). Since typhoid fever was endemic in 19th-century America, any large assembly of recruits from different parts of the country was sure to include some individuals already infected with the disease. The Typhoid Board estimated that a newly levied volunteer regiment of about 1,300 men included one to four individuals infected with *B. typhosus*. Within an incubation period of one to two weeks after rendezvous, their stools provided the locus of typhoid pathogens that could infect their susceptible comrades. The minimum infective dose of *B. typhosus* was later determined to be in the range of a hundred viable cells (Tigertt 1959). This small dose not only favored fly transmission, but underscored the necessity for diligence in enforcing camp sanitation.<sup>55</sup>

The U.S. army learned immediately from its mistake in the Spanish-American War as evidenced by its intense focus on preventing tropical diseases during the Filipino insurrection immediately following the Spanish-American War. Additionally, the U.S. Army Medical Department worked at eradicating dengue (a type of tropical fever) and beriberi (diet induced ailment) to the benefit of all.<sup>56</sup>

Another medical problem that emerged and was addressed via military medical work was Yellow Fever. Over 2,000 U.S. soldiers were infected with a wave of Yellow Fever during the Spanish-American War. Although the war ended before a second wave could hit, the U.S. Army had plenty of motivation to resolve the issues of Yellow Fever as 50,000 U.S. troops were to remain stationed in Cuba during the first U.S. occupation. During the occupation, Dr. Walter Reed and others were able to prove the link between mosquitoes and Yellow Fever and identify the parasite causing Yellow Fever. The medical discoveries sanitized Cuba and prevented Yellow Fever in future situations like building the Panama Canal.<sup>57</sup> All of the organizational blunders and medical challenges presented by the Spanish-American War helped better prepare the U.S. military for future engagements. Civilians benefited from these medical advancements as well.

Another consequence of the Spanish-American War was a serious disagreement within the United States about whether the U.S. should be playing an imperialistic role in the world. The Spanish American War ushered in a new wave of imperialism and with it a backlash in the U.S. known as the anti-imperialist movement.

A variety of national figures were part of the movement: William Jennings Bryan, Andrew Carnegie, Carl Schurz, Grover Cleveland Jr., Mark Twain, Samuel

Gompers, Dallas Star Jordan and Thomas Reed. There was even an official organization called the Anti-Imperialist League. The movement enjoyed most of its influence from 1900-1902. The core disagreement the anti-imperialists had the Spanish-American War and the subsequent expansion of the United States was political principle. They were concerned that these actions defied core U.S. political beliefs and could bring the downfall of the republic as Fred Harrington writes in his article *The Anti-Imperialist Movement in the United States, 1898-1900*:

The anti-imperialists did not oppose colonial expansion for commercial, religious, constitutional, or humanitarian reasons. They opposed it because they thought that an imperialist policy ran counter to the political doctrines of the Declaration of Independence, Washington's Farewell Address, and Lincoln's Gettysburg Address—the documents which asserted that a government could not rule peoples without their consent, and that the United States, having been conceived as an instrument of and for its own people, should not imitate the methods or interfere in the affairs of Old World Nations in any way.<sup>58</sup>

The founder of the anti-imperialist league, Carl Schurz, represented the thoughts of many of the anti-imperialists when he opined that the republic could not endure if it continued down the imperialist path.<sup>59</sup> Others opposed imperialism different reasons. Business leaders such as Andrew Carnegie thought war was bad for commerce (he was also a pacifist). A labor union leader, Samuel Gompers, was concerned about the potential of low-wage earners (Asians) competing in the job market. Some anti-imperialists, such as John F. Fitzgerald were openly racist and were opposed to non-white races joining the Union.<sup>60</sup> The differences among the anti-imperialists made unity difficult to accomplish and without unity it was difficult to success as a political force. The imperialists, led by Theodore Roosevelt, Henry Cabot Lodge, etc. enjoyed popularity

because of their energetic and seemingly patriotic stances. After William Jennings Bryan lost the presidential election in 1900 to President McKinley and new Vice-President, Theodore Roosevelt, the anti-imperialist movement lost most of its steam.<sup>61</sup> However, the movement raised important questions about conflicting principles and in U.S. foreign policy the same questions are still being asked today.

One of the most famous quotes associated with the Spanish-American War was by then U.S. Secretary of State, John Hay, referring to the war as “that splendid little war.” It was a splendid little war to the U.S. in many respects. The U.S. accomplished its primary objective as stated in President McKinley’s request for war presented to the U.S. Congress on April 25, 1998, “...that the Government of Spain relinquish its authority and Government in the island of Cuba, and to withdraw its land and naval forces from Cuba and Cuban waters...”<sup>62</sup> Not only did the U.S. accomplish its primary objective, it accomplished it quickly. Spain was defeated in just a few months of combat and the U.S. suffered few casualties. Cuba was liberated (although with constrictions put on by the U.S.) The U.S. acquired new territory as a result of the war and emerged as a strong world power after defeating Spain so easily. Hay’s statement is justified by analysis of the results of the conflict. However, there is a flip side to such an easy outcome. In many respects, the splendid little war gave war a good name.<sup>63</sup> The war with Spain did not last long enough and the U.S. did not encounter enough casualties to truly experience the ugliness of war. Strong anti-war movements never mounted in the U.S. Support and patriotism were easy. As a result, the frequency of U.S. military intervention in the world (Caribbean, Asia, and Central America) following the Spanish American War was unprecedented. A not so splendid war (long lasting, high casualties,

lack of success or unclear objectives) in all likelihood would have tempered enthusiasm for military conflict; that not so splendid war would not happen for the U.S. until Vietnam. The Spanish-American war did not prepare the American public for the true nature of war because the public (unless they had loved ones serve) was impacted very little by the war.

### *Analysis of the Consequences*

The U.S. clearly expanded as a result of the Spanish American war, acquiring Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Guam from Spain; only Puerto Rico and Guam remained U.S. protectorates. New imperialistic tendencies were displayed via leaders such Theodore Roosevelt, Henry Cabot Lodge and Elihu Root. Despite new imperialism, expansion was near end after the acquisition of the territory offered in the Treaty of Paris. Imperialism in a traditional sense never materialized. U.S. imperialism in the period after the Spanish-American war can not be compared to imperialism as practiced by the great powers of Europe in earlier centuries: England, France, Spain, etc. U.S. imperialism never matched the scope of those imperialist nations. Expansion and imperialism are noted consequences of the war but limited in actual consequential significance. The anti-imperialist debate in the U.S. after the war was short-lived, and arguably not effective; therefore, it was a minor consequence of the Spanish-American War.

From a military perspective, there was a lot to learn from the war in terms of improving military organization, effectiveness and medical conditions. The lessons learned from the war clearly helped make the U.S. military stronger and more medically savvy for future conflicts. These consequences are not insignificant.

Cuban independence is a direct and important consequence of the Spanish American War. Cuban independence was the primary stated objective of the war and therefore the result of Cuban independence is an important consequence of the Spanish-American war. However, the most important consequence of the war was the emergence of the U.S. as a world power. The war gave the U.S. the knowledge, the bravado and the sense of responsibility necessary to be a world leader. The aggressiveness of U.S. foreign policy following the war demonstrates U.S.'s emerging role as a major player in the world: forcing the building of the Panama Canal, Roosevelt Corollary, multiple U.S. military interventions in Latin America, etc. The U.S. arguably did not fit into its shoes as a world power until after World War I but the shoes were made on the heels of the Spanish American War.

### *Conclusion*

The Spanish-American war was a brief military conflict in 1898. Spanish reconcentration policy, "yellow journalism" and mostly the reaction of the American public to the sinking of the *Maine* motivated the U.S. to go to war. The U.S. won the war easily and quickly, gaining new possessions and increased global responsibilities. The most important consequence of the war was that the U.S. emerged as a budding world power.

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