



## MacArthur Memorial Education Programs

### Spanish American War Primary Resources



Frederick Remington, *Charge of the Rough Riders at San Juan Hill*

#### Background

The Monroe Doctrine of 1823 declared that European involvement in the Western Hemisphere would be viewed by the United States as a threat to national security. Spain had occupied Cuba since the sixteenth century, but it was not until the late nineteenth century that public opinion in the United States began to favor Cuban independence. Newspaper magnates like William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer flooded the American public with sensationalized accounts of the Cuban struggle. This “yellow journalism” agitated for war against Spain by highlighting real and imagined Spanish atrocities.

Citing the Monroe Doctrine and responding to overwhelming public opinion against Spain, the United States sent the *USS Maine* to Havana on January 25, 1898, to protect American business interests and to demonstrate an interest in the conflict. On February 15, 1898, an explosion sank the *USS Maine* in Havana Harbor, resulting in the deaths of 274 crewmembers. Although the disaster was likely an accident, Spain was immediately blamed by the newspapers, and “Remember the Maine!” became a rallying cry in the United States.

Under enormous pressure, but unwilling to go to war, President McKinley asked Spain to give Cuba its independence. Spain refused and declared war on the United States on April 25, 1898. The United States reciprocated and within several months had destroyed the Spanish Navy and gained possession of Spain’s colonies. Virtually overnight – over the course of 113 days in 1898 – America had become a superpower.

# Primary Document #1

"Who Destroyed the Maine?" *New York Journal*, February 17, 1898

**\$50,000 REWARD.—WHO DESTROYED THE MAINE?—\$50,000 REWARD.**

EDITION FOR GREATER NEW YORK.

**NEW YORK JOURNAL**

AND ADVERTISER.

**\$50,000!**

**\$50,000 REWARD!**

**For the Detection of the Perpetrator of the Maine Outrage!**

The New York Journal tender offers a reward of \$50,000 CASH for information, FURNISHED TO IT EXCLUSIVELY, which will lead to the detection and conviction of the person, persons or persons responsible for the crime which resulted in the destruction of the Maine, at Havana, of the United States war ship Maine and the loss of 258 lives of American sailors.

The \$50,000 CASH reward for the crime information is to appear with White, Farns & Co.

No one is to be the recipient for suspected persons unless a firm guarantee is given by a firm or the amount of a personal bond or other security, to be paid in full to the Journal before the reward is paid.

The Journal believes that the person or persons responsible for the crime will be found and that the reward will be paid to the person or persons who first furnish the information.

**FOR THE PERPETRATOR OF THIS OUTRAGE NO REWARD.**

W. B. HEIST.

Assistant Secretary Roosevelt

Convinced the Explosion of

the War Ship Was Not

an Accident.

The Journal Offers \$50,000 Reward for the

Conviction of the Criminals Who Sent

258 American Sailors to Their Death.

Naval Officers Unanimous That

the Ship Was Destroyed

on Purpose.

**\$50,000!**

**\$50,000 REWARD!**

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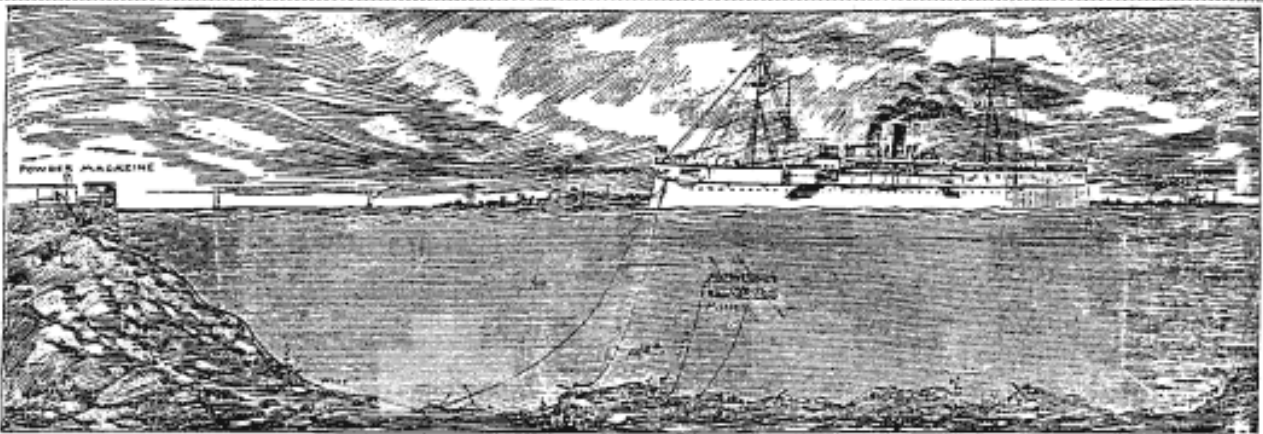
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**FOR THE PERPETRATOR OF THIS OUTRAGE NO REWARD.**

W. B. HEIST.



## NAVAL OFFICERS THINK THE MAINE WAS DESTROYED BY A SPANISH MINE.

George Eugene Brown, the Journal's special correspondent at Havana, cables that it is the secret opinion of many Spaniards in the Cuban capital that the Maine was destroyed and full of her men killed by means of a submarine mine, or fixed torpedo. This is the opinion of several American naval authorities. The Spaniards, it is believed, managed to have the Maine anchored over one of the harbor mines. It was supposed the mine was a powder magazine, and it is thought the explosion was caused by sending an electric current through the wire. If this can be proved, the brutal nature of the Spaniards will be shown by the fact that they wanted to spring the mine and kill all the men and women on board. The Spaniards chose the place where the mine was laid down.

Hidden Mine or a Sunken Torpedo Believed to Have Been the Weapon Used Against the American Man-of-War—Officers and Men Tell Thrilling Stories of Being Blown Into the Air Amid a Mass of Shattered Steel and Exploding Shells—Survivors Brought to Key West Scout the Idea of Accident—Spanish Officials Protest Too Much—Our Cabinet Orders a Searching Inquiry—Journal Sends Divers to Havana to Report Upon the Condition of the Wreck.

## **Background Information: Primary Document #1**

Competing newspaper owners William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer were master propagandists who used sensational stories about the major political and social issues of the late nineteenth century to sell newspapers. Their newspapers inflamed public opinion against Spain, helped precipitate the Spanish-American War, and increased the American public's interest in America's role abroad.

The Merriam-Webster's Dictionary defines propaganda as "ideas, facts, or allegations spread deliberately to further one's cause or to damage an opposing cause." Propaganda can be partially based on accurate facts, but these facts are usually distorted or manipulated by propagandists to convey the impression the propagandist desires. This was certainly the case in terms of the Spanish-American War.

On Feb. 15, 1898, following the explosion on the *USS Maine*, the ship's commanding officer Captain Sigsbee wrote the following message:

*"Maine blown up in Havana Harbor at nine-forty tonight and destroyed. Many wounded and doubtless more killed or drowned. Wounded and others on board Spanish man-of-war and Ward Line steamer. Send lighthouse tenders from Key West for crew and the few pieces of equipment above water. No one has clothing other than that upon him. Public opinion should be suspended until further report. All Spanish officers, including representatives of General Blanco, now with me to express sympathy."*

The *New York Journal* was owned by Hearst, and its headline: "Who Destroyed the Maine?" is a perfect example of yellow journalism. Although Captain Sigsbee cautioned against jumping to conclusions, the media had already reached a verdict.

**Primary Source Analysis:**

1. What triggered the Spanish American War?
2. What is yellow journalism?
3. Who does the article blame for the explosion on the *USS Maine*? What evidence in the paper supports this?
4. How do you think people would have responded to this article? Do you think it influenced their willingness to go to war?
5. Do you think that the media influences public opinion today? Why or why not?



Primary Document #2

"Information Wanted" in *Judge* June 11, 1898



## **Background Information: Primary Document #2**

“Information Wanted” was published in *Judge* in June 1898 – shortly after Commodore George Dewey’s victory over the Spanish Navy at the Battle of Manila Bay on May 1, 1898. Within a matter of hours, Dewey’s fleet had destroyed the aging Spanish Navy and had captured Manila harbor. This victory paved the way for American and Filipino forces to capture large parts of the Philippines from the Spanish Colonial Government.

While this was happening, fleets from Germany, Great Britain, France, and Japan showed up in Manila Bay. Ostensibly, they had arrived to protect the interests of their citizens, but they were also there waiting to fill the power vacuum left by the defeat of Spain. Tensions were high, and it was very clear that if the Americans left, another power would take control of the Philippines.

“Information Wanted” reflects the quandary that the United States found itself in around this time. As the war drew to a close, it became more and more clear to the American public that victory against Spain was not as cut and dry as Dewey’s smashing victory made it seem. Victory had brought with it unwanted or unexpected responsibilities. The stated goal of the war against Spain had been to liberate – and now, with other powers hovering over the Philippines waiting for the chance to add it to their colonial possessions, the United States was in a difficult position.

**Primary Source Analysis:**

1. What is imperialism? What countries practiced imperialism during this time frame?
2. What territories did the United States acquire after the Spanish American War?
3. What do the man and baby in the cartoon represent? How do you know?
4. What suggestion is the cartoon trying to make about the relationship between the United States and the Philippines? Cite examples from the cartoon to support your claim.
5. According to this cartoon, what was the attitude of the United States towards imperialism?
6. Why do you think the author is trying to make this statement about the United States and its new territory? Cite examples to support your claim.

**Primary Document #3**

**"Humanity of American Commanders," Unknown Newspaper, August 1898**

**Humanity of American Commanders.**

"It was impossible to praise too highly the humanity of Admiral Dewey and Gen. Merritt, for a bombardment of the walled city would have inflicted severe loss of life upon women and children. The conduct of the Americans, officers and men alike, towards all, is highly creditable. It is difficult to realize that they are invading troops occupying a hostile town.



### **Background Information Primary Document #3**

This excerpt from an unknown newspaper describes the efforts of Admiral Dewey and General Merritt to avoid civilian casualties as their respective forces lay siege to Manila – the capitol of the Philippines held by the Spanish Colonial Government.

Narratives describing the “humanity” and idealism of American forces stood in stark contrast to stories about Spanish atrocities that were a major staple of yellow journalism. Casting the war as a classic battle of “Good vs. Evil,” articles like this sought to differentiate the United States from “Old World” European nations and other emerging Powers.

At the time, the American forces were allied with native Filipino forces who were fighting for Philippine independence from Spanish rule. The Spanish Governor-General of Manila ultimately decided to surrender – but on the condition that he surrender to the United States, not to Filipino forces. Accepting this offer, the Americans entered the city but forbid the Filipinos from taking part in the “liberation” of Manila. Incensed at being excluded, the Filipino forces soon realized that the American forces would not be leaving when the war ended. This led to the Philippine-American War.

**Primary Source Analysis:**

1. What is the main idea of the article?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Is the article an example of “yellow journalism?” Why or why not?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What does the article say about American troops abroad?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. How would you assess the responsibilities of American troops abroad?  
Do you agree with the decisions of Admiral Dewey and General Merritt to  
avoid a bombardment in order to save the lives of civilian men, women,  
and children? Why or why not?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Think about the wars the United States has been involved in since the  
Spanish American War. Did civilians in World War I, World War II, the  
Korean War, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf War, and the wars in  
Iraq/Afghanistan face difficulties like those mentioned in the article? Did  
military leaders? Cite examples to support your argument.

**Primary Document #4**

***African American Soldiers Departing for Cuba, 1898***



#### **Background Information Primary Document #4**

African Americans have participated in every war the United States has been involved in – from the Revolutionary War to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Spanish American War was no exception, and several African American units participated in the fighting in Cuba.

African Americans were encouraged to join the military, but they served in segregated units and their contributions were not always recognized. One example of this is the Battle of San Juan Hill – the most famous battle of the war. Although Theodore Roosevelt and the Rough Riders are solely credited with driving the Spanish from San Juan Hill, African American units also played a major role in the battle.

Six African Americans received the Medal of Honor for their actions during the Spanish American War. Despite the proven bravery of these soldiers and their willingness to fight for their country, the military remained segregated. In 1948, an Executive Order mandated the integration of the armed forces. Integration was finally achieved by the end of the Korean War – more than 50 years after the Spanish American War.



### **Primary Source Analysis:**

1. What was the attitude of Americans towards African Americans at the time of the Spanish American War? How had the treatment of African-Americans changed since the Civil War?
2. What comparison could you make between the soldiers depicted in the photo and African American soldiers that fought during the Civil War?
3. Do you think African Americans would have been eager to fight for the United States during the Spanish American War? Why or why not?
4. Who were the Rough Riders? Did African Americans join the Rough Riders?
5. The charge of the Rough Riders at San Juan Hill became the most famous image of the Spanish American War. Few people today know that the Rough Riders were supported by a regiment of African American soldiers. Why do you think this history was “lost?”