

Causes of the Spanish-American War

Read Documents A and B, which are both newspaper stories written about the sinking of the battleship *USS Maine*. Then, in the chart on your handout, compare the two stories.

Document A: New York Journal

Purchased by William Randolph Hearst in 1895, the Journal published investigative and human interest stories that used a highly emotional writing style and included banner headlines and graphic images.

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

EDITION FOR GREATER NEW YORK.

NEW YORK JOURNAL

AND ADVERTISER.

NO. 3,372. NEW YORK, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 1898.—10 PAGES. PRICE ONE CENT.

DESTRUCTION OF THE WAR SHIP MAINE WAS THE WORK OF AN ENEMY

\$50,000!

\$50,000 REWARD!

For the Detection of the Perpetrator of the Maine Outrage!

The New York Journal offers a reward of \$50,000 to any person who will furnish information, furnished in a satisfactory manner, that will convict the person or persons who sank the Maine.

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!

For the Detection of the Perpetrator of the Maine Outrage!

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Article Text: NAVAL OFFICERS THINK THE MAINE WAS DESTROYED BY A SPANISH MINE.

George Bryson, the Journal's special reporter at Havana, writes that it is the secret opinion of many people in Havana that the war ship Maine was destroyed by a mine and 258 men were killed on purpose by the Spanish. This is the opinion of several American naval authorities.

The Spaniards, it is believed, arranged to have the Maine drop anchor over a harbor mine. Wires connected the mine to the magazine of the ship. If this is true, the brutal nature of the Spaniards will be shown by the fact that they waited to explode the mine until all the men had gone to sleep.

Spanish officials are protesting too much that they did not do it. Our government has ordered an investigation. This newspaper has sent divers to Havana to report on the condition of the wreck. This newspaper is also offering a \$50,000 reward for exclusive evidence that will convict whoever is responsible.

Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt says he is convinced that the destruction of the Maine in Havana Harbor was not an accident. The suspicion that the Maine was purposely blown up grows stronger every hour. Not a single fact to the contrary has been produced.

Source: Excerpt from New York Journal and Advertiser, February 17, 1898.

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Document B: New York Times

Established in 1851, the New York Times provided investigative coverage of local New York issues and events, as well as national and international news.

MAINE'S HULL WILL DECIDE

Divers to Find Whether the Force
of the Explosion Was from the
Exterior or Interior.

SHE WAS AFLOAT FOR AN HOUR

Spontaneous Combustion in Coal Bunk-
ers a Frequent Peril to the Maga-
zines of Warships — Hard to
Blow Up the Magazine.

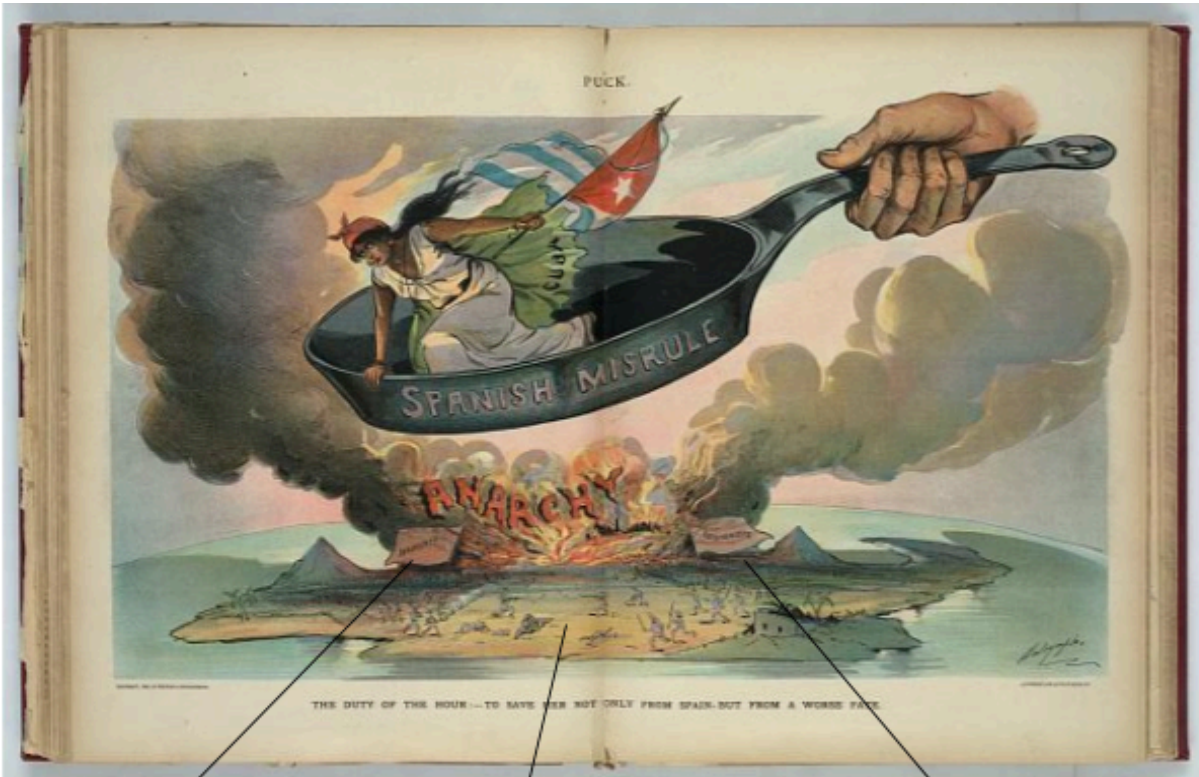
WASHINGTON, Feb. 16 – After a day of intense excitement at the Navy Department and elsewhere, growing out of the destruction of the battleship Maine in Havana Harbor last night, the situation at sundown, after the exchange of a number of cablegrams between Washington and Havana, can be summed up in the words of Secretary Long, who when asked as he was about to depart for the day whether he had reason to suspect that the disaster was the work of the enemy, replied: "I do not. In that I am influenced by the fact that Capt. Sigsbee has not yet reported to the Navy Department on the cause. He is evidently waiting to write a full report. So long as he does not express himself, I certainly cannot. I should think from the indications, however, that there was an accident – that the magazine exploded. How that came about I do not know. For the present, at least, no other warship will be sent to Havana."

Capt. Schuley, who has had experience with such large and complicated machines of war as the New York, did not entertain the idea that the ship had been destroyed by design (on purpose). He had found that with frequent and very careful inspection fire would sometimes be generated in the coal bunkers, and he told of such a fire on board of the New York close to the magazine, and so hot that the heat had blistered the steel partition between the fire and the ammunition before the bunkers and magazine were flooded. He was not prepared to believe that the Spanish or Cubans in Havana were supplied with either the information or the appliances necessary to enable them to make so complete a work of demolition, while the Maine was under guard...

Source: Excerpt from New York Times, February 17, 1898.

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Doc 1: Spanish Misrule” [Puck Magazine 1898](#) - the caption reads: “The duty of the hour: - to save her not only from Spain, but from a worse fate.” In 1895, Cubans started fighting a war against Spain to gain independence. Many Americans supported the Cubans because they believed the Spanish treated the Cubans harshly, especially after many Cubans were forced into detention camps.



Cuban insurgents (Spanish loyalists)

Cuban autonomists (independence fighters)

Island of Cuba

Vocabulary:

Anarchy - state of disorder

Analysis Questions

- 1) According to this cartoon, what is the duty of the hour for the United States regarding Cuba?
- 2) What does the author seem to think will happen if the US *does not* get involved in the Cuban fight for independence?

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Document 2: The Monroe Doctrine

In 1823, President Monroe issued what came to be called the Monroe Doctrine, declaring that ". . . [T]he American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers . . ." and pledging support for countries that declared their independence from European countries.



Analysis Questions:

1. How might the Monroe Doctrine have influenced the way the US felt about Cubans fighting for their independence? According to the Monroe Doctrine, what should the US do if Cuba declared its independence from Spain?
2. Why might the US want Cuba to win independence from Spain?

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Document 3: The De Lome Letter Controversy

Source: Dyal, Donald H.. Historical Dictionary of the Spanish American War. Greenwood Press: Westport, CT, 1996.

On February 9, 1898, Spanish ambassador Enrique Dupuy de Lôme wrote a personal letter to his friend José Canalejas who was in Cuba. The letter contained insulting comments about President McKinley and his policies concerning Cuba, calling the president a "pansy."

New York Journal owner William Randolph Hearst was sent a copy of the letter and published it on February 9, with the headline "The Worst Insult to the United States in Its History." Once Hearst published the letter, the news of the insults filled newspapers across the country, and the story became a true international scandal--the U.S. public was outraged, the President demanded an apology, and the ambassador resigned. Days later, on February 15th, the *USS Maine* exploded. In the end, the De Lôme letter scandal along with the Maine explosion left the U.S. public calling for action and pushed the United States closer to war..

Below: A copy of *The New York Journal* after the De Lome Letter was leaked to the press.



Analysis Questions

1. Why would the De Lome letter lead some in the US, including the president McKinley, who had opposed war, to become more willing to invade Cuba?
2. Consider the timing of the De Lome letter. How might the release of the letter, coupled with the Maine explosion, push the US to war?
3. Why do you think Hearst purposefully published the letter?

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Document 4: President McKinley's State of the Union Address

President McKinley went before Congress to ask for a declaration of war against Spain.

The grounds for such intervention may be briefly summarized as follows:

First, in the cause of humanity and to put an end to the barbarities, bloodshed, starvation, and horrible miseries now existing there . . .

Second, we owe it to our citizens [living] in Cuba to afford them that protection and for life and property which no government there can or will afford . . .

Third, the right to intervene may be justified by the very serious injury to the commerce, trade, and business of our people, and by the destruction of property and devastation of the island.

Fourth. . . With such a conflict waged for years in an island so near us and with which our people have such trade and business relations; when the lives and liberty of our citizens are in constant danger and their property destroyed and themselves ruined; where our trading vessels are liable to seizure and are seized at our very door by warships of a foreign nation, . . . all these and others . . . are a constant menace to our peace The destruction of the Maine has filled the national heart with inexpressible horror. . . .

Source: Excerpt from President William McKinley's War Message to Congress, April 11, 1898.

Vocabulary

Barbarities: extreme cruelties

Commerce: Trade, business

Analysis Questions

1. What four reasons does McKinley give for going to war against Spain?
2. How does McKinley justify war? Why did he think it was in the best interest of the US and Cuba?

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Document 5: Reconcentration Camps

By the late 1800s, the Spanish were losing control of Cuba. Concerned about guerilla warfare in the countryside, they moved rural Cubans to “reconcentration” (reconcentrado) camps where the Spanish claimed they would be better able to protect them. Any person who failed to obey was shot. Food was scarce and famine and disease quickly swept through the camps. By 1898, one third of Cuba's population had been forcibly sent into the concentration camps. This account of a camp was forwarded to Washington, D.C., by Fitzhugh Lee, U.S. Consul General in Havana, who said its author was “a man of integrity and character.”

SIR: . . .[W]e will relate to you what we saw with our own eyes: 460 women and children thrown on the ground...some in a dying condition, others sick and others dead...The circumstances are the following: complete accumulation of bodies dead and alive, so that it was impossible to take one step without walking over them; the greatest [lack] of cleanliness, want of light, air, and water; the food lacking in quality and quantity what was necessary to sustain life. . . . From all this we conclude that the number of deaths among the reconcentrados has amounted to 77%.

Vocabulary

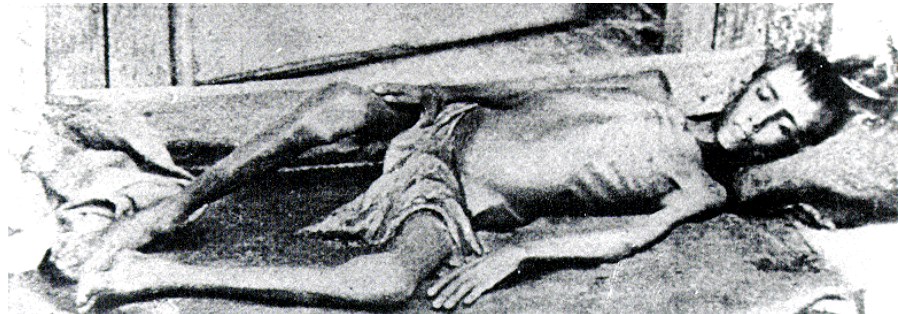
consul-general: a government official living in a foreign country charged with overseeing the protection of U.S. citizens and promoting trade

accumulation: a gathering or piling up of something

reconcentrados: the reconcentration camp prisoners



Images from the Reconcentration camps. By 1898, one third of Cuba's population had been forcibly sent into the concentration camps. Over 400,000 Cubans died as a result of the Spanish Reconcentration Policy.



Analysis Questions:

1. How do you think people in the US would have reacted to reading this letter?
2. How might some in the US use this letter and the descriptions of conditions in the camps as a justification for war?

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Document 6: March of the Flag

Alfred Beveridge gave this speech while he was campaigning to become a senator for Indiana. The speech helped him win the election and made him one of the leading advocates of American expansion.

Fellow citizens...

The Opposition tells us that we ought not to govern a people without their consent. I answer: The rule of liberty that all just government derives its authority from the consent of the governed, applies only to those who are capable of self-government. I answer, We govern the Indians without their consent, we govern our territories without their consent, we govern our children without their consent.

They ask us how we will govern these new possessions. I answer: If England can govern foreign lands, so can America. If Germany can govern foreign lands, so can America. . . .

What does all this mean for every one of us? It means opportunity...It means that the resources and the commerce of these immensely rich dominions will be increased. . . .

In Cuba, alone, there are 15,000,000 acres of forest unacquainted with the axe. There are exhaustless mines of iron. . . . There are millions of acres yet unexplored. . . . It means new employment and better wages for every laboring man in the Union (US). . . .

Ah! as our commerce spreads, [our] flag of liberty will circle the globe. . . . Benighted peoples will know that the voice of Liberty is speaking, at last, for them; that civilization is dawning, at last, for them. . . .

Fellow Americans, we are God's chosen people. . . .

Vocabulary

Consent: permission

dominions: controlled territories

Exhaustless: endless

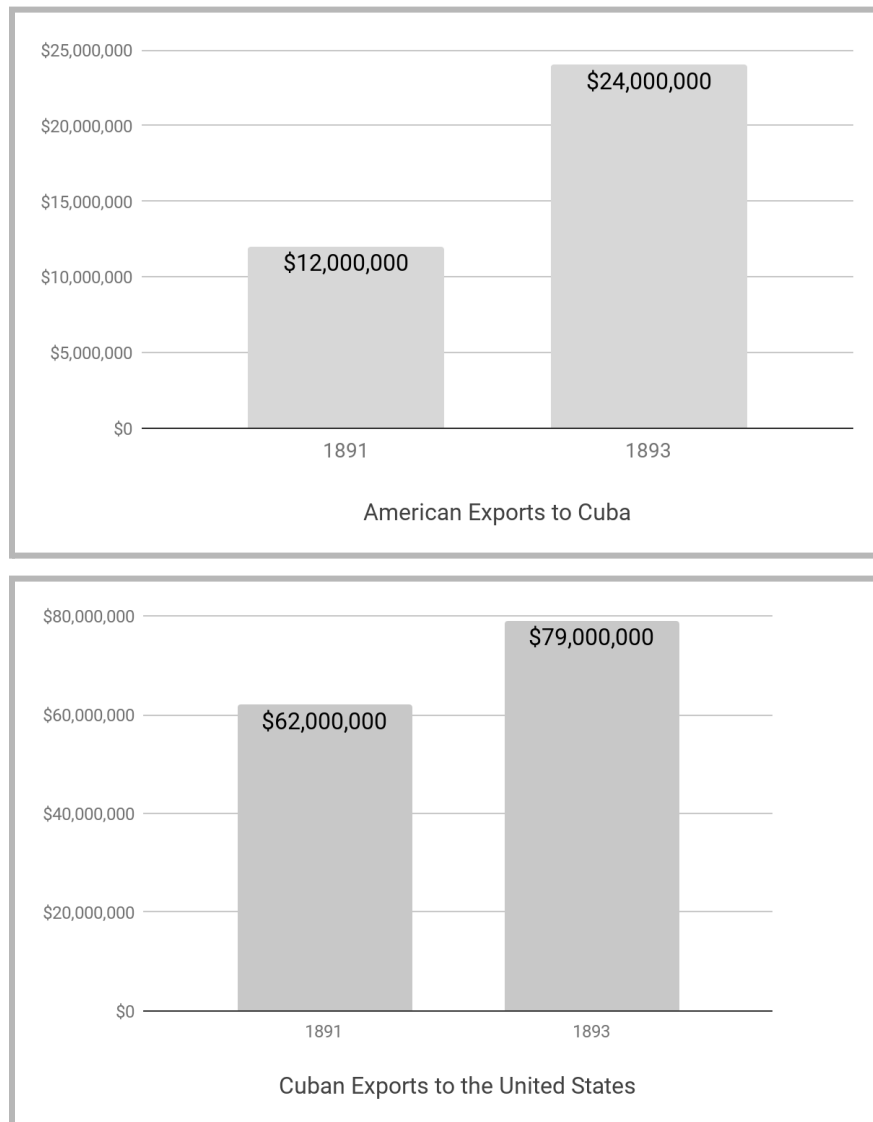
benighted: pitifully ignorant

Analysis Questions:

1. According to Beveridge, how would expansion and acquiring Cuba benefit the US?
2. According to Beveridge, how would US expansion benefit other territories such as Cuba? How does he justify the US controlling other territories?

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Document 7: Graphs of Cuban Exports and Imports [\(source of data\)](#)



In the 1880s, US businessmen began investing heavily in Cuba, especially in sugar plantations. In 1894 nearly 90% of Cuba's exports went to the United States and 38% of US exports went to Cuba.

Exports: Goods that a country sells to another country

Imports: Goods a country buys from another country

Analysis Questions

1. What was the United States' trade relationship with Cuba? Did the US benefit from trade with Cuba?
2. How might the US trade relationship with Cuba have influenced the United States' decision to go to war over Cuba?

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Doc 8: *White Man's Burden: The United States and the Philippines* by Rudyard Kipling

During the Spanish-American War, the US also fought the Spanish to gain control of the Philippines. In February 1899, British novelist and poet Rudyard Kipling wrote a poem entitled "The White Man's Burden: The United States and The Philippine Islands." In this poem, Kipling urged the U.S. to take up the "burden" of empire, as had Britain and other European nations.

Take up the White Man's burden—
Send forth the best ye breed—
Go send your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need

To wait in heavy harness
On fluttered folk and wild—
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half devil and half child

Take up the White Man's burden
In patience to abide
To veil the threat of terror
And check the show of pride;

By open speech and simple
An hundred times made plain
To seek another's profit
And work another's gain

Take up the White Man's burden—
And reap his old reward:
The blame of those ye better
The hate of those ye guard—

The cry of hosts ye humour
(Ah slowly) to the light:
"Why brought ye us from bondage,
Our loved Egyptian night?"

Take up the White Man's burden-
Have done with childish days-
The lightly proffered laurel,
The easy, ungrudged praise.

Comes now, to search your manhood
Through all the thankless years,
Cold-edged with dear-bought wisdom,
The judgment of your peers!

Vocabulary

Burden: a task or responsibility that is difficult

Breed: kind, type

Exile: banishment

Harness: straps that usually are attached to horses or cows for the purpose of using a cart or plow

Sullen: bad tempered

Abide: accept

Reap: cut or gather

Proffered: offered

Laurel: aromatic evergreen shrub

Ungrudged: not challenged or objected to

Analysis Questions

1. In the second verse, how does Kipling describe the colonized people or captives?
2. What is the "white man's burden?" According to Kipling (the author), what is the duty of the "white man?"
3. When Americans read this poem, how do you think it helped them justify their involvement in Cuba?

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Doc 9: Outcome of the Spanish-American War: Territorial Gains of the US

When the US defeated the Spanish in the Spanish-American War, Spain had to cede (give up) control of Cuba, Guam, the Philippines and Puerto Rico to the US.



Analysis Questions

1. What did the US gain from the Spanish-American War?
2. Based on these gains, why might the US have been interested in going to war with Spain in the first place?

Doc 10: The Platt Amendment

The Platt Amendment was signed by Congress 1901, after the end of the Spanish-American War. It outlined the role of the US in Cuba and allowed the United States "the right to intervene for the preservation of Cuban independence, the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty..." Cuba would be an independent country, but the US would control or have a say in many of its economic and foreign policy decisions and would be allowed special business and trade deals as well as naval bases. Many Cubans resented (disliked) the fact that they had fought for independence from Spain, but had really just replaced one unwelcome ruler (Spain) with another (the US).

Analysis Questions:

1. What does the Platt Amendment show about the intentions of the US in Cuba? Do you think they were ever going to truly allow Cuba to be independent, or were they simply trying to get rid of Spain?
2. How did the US "replace" Spain in Cuba? Why do you think the US did not want to allow Cuba to have complete independence? How might it benefit the US?