

The Spanish-American War
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Suggested Grade Level: High School; American History

“Nah, We Don’t Want Your Stuff...Really, We Don’t”; A Look at Early 20th Century American Imperialism in Cuba.

General Directions:

The following question is based on the accompanying documents. Some of these documents have been edited for the purpose of this exercise. Study each document and answer the question(s) attached to the document. You will be using these documents and your answers to respond to an essay relating to the topic.

Assignment:

You are required to compose a four to five paragraph essay that incorporates facts from the documents in addition to your knowledge of the primary historical period in American History: 20th Century Imperialism.

Question: Was the Spanish-American War (1898) justified or was it simply an act of American aggression and imperialism?

Historical Overview:

The collective and successful Wars of Independence of Spain’s Latin American colonies (Argentina, Paraguay, Venezuela, Peru, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, Panama, Mexico) left her only with the colonies of Cuba and Puerto Rico in the Western Hemisphere by the late 19th and early 20th centuries. And Spain’s hold on these territories was rapidly weakening. Cuba, following the leads of other Latin American countries, was posed to seek independence from Spain. The War of Cuban Independence began in 1895 and President McKinley sent the warship *Maine* to Havana as a friendly gesture. The battleship was sunk in the Havana harbor with the loss of hundreds of American lives. The sinking of the *Maine* was sensationalized in the major newspapers of the country and the United States found itself in a war that it had attempted to avoid under the presidencies of both Cleveland and McKinley. The Spanish-American War lasted approximately four months. The close geographical presence of the United States to Cuba plus the strong economic ties of the Cuban sugar industry and American sugar industrialists lent itself to a situation of paternalism between Cuba and the US. The American sugar tycoons controlled the majority of the Cuban sugar production by the late 1800s, no small note since Cuba provided approximately one third of the world’s sugar production. In 1898, Enrique Dupuy De Lome, Spanish Ambassador to the United States, criticized President McKinley and the Americans’ for their proposed and actual interference in the war between Cuba and Spain in a private letter to Don Jose Canalejas, a Spanish politician. Economics, the belief in Manifest Destiny, and the media, i.e. “yellow journalism”, played interconnected roles in influencing America’s participation in the Spanish-American War.

At the end of the war, in April 1898, the Teller Amendment was passed by Congress stating that the United States would not seek permanent control over Cuba; this was amended in 1903 by the Platt Amendment, a treaty that was intended to protect Cuba’s newly found status as a free nation while at the same time insuring extensive US involvement and control over the island’s political and economic affairs.

The U.S. Naval Base Guantanamo Bay is the oldest U.S. base overseas, located on the southeast corner of Cuba. Consisting of approximately 45 square miles, it was established in December 1903 per the Platt Amendment.

Imperialism: The policy, practice, or advocacy of extending the power and dominion of a nation especially by direct territorial acquisitions or by gaining indirect control over the political or economic life of other areas.

(Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, 1986)

Document 1: The Monroe Doctrine: President Monroe's annual speech to Congress, December 2, 1823

"...In the discussions to which this interest has given rise and in the arrangements by which they may terminate the occasion has been judged proper for asserting, as a principle in which the rights and interests of the United States are involved, that the 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...

...We owe it, therefore, to candor, and to the amicable relations existing between the United States and those powers, to declare, that we should consider any attempt on their part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere, as dangerous to our peace and safety. With the existing colonies or dependencies of any European power we have not interfered, and shall not interfere. But with the governments who have declared their independence, and maintained it, and whose independence we have, on great consideration, and on just principles, acknowledged, we could not view any interposition for the purpose of oppressing them, or controlling, in any other manner, their destiny, by any European power in any other light than as the manifestation of an unfriendly disposition towards the United States. In the war between those new governments and Spain we declared our neutrality at the time of their recognition, and to this we have adhered, and shall continue to adhere, provided no change shall occur, which, in the judgment of the competent authorities of this government, shall make a corresponding change, on the part of the United States, indispensable to their security...

Question A: Who are the "the American continents" and "governments who have declared their independence"?

Question B: What was Monroe's inference to the European countries about consequences of their possible interference in the Americas?

Document 2: Spanish Ambassador's Enrique Dupuy de Lome's letter to the Spanish Minister Canalejas dated December 1897; published in American newspapers in February 1898

"...The situation here continues unchanged. Everything depends on the political and military success in Cuba....Besides the natural and inevitable coarseness with which he repeats all that the press and public opinion of Spain has said of Weyler, it shows once more what McKinley is: weak and catering to the rabble, and, besides, a low politician..."

Question C: What is de Lome's opinion of President McKinley?

Document 3: Correspondence between the United States and Spain

Note of United States to Spain, September 23, 1897

LEGATION OF THE UNITED STATES
San Sebastian, Spain, September 23, 1897

“YOUR EXCELLENCY...

...The question arises, then, whether Spain has not already had a reasonable time to restore peace and been unable to do so, even by tremendous concentration and expenditure of her resources and by the employment of measures of unusual severity. The methods which Spain has adopted to wage the fight give no prospect of immediate peace or of a stable return to the conditions of prosperity which are essential to Cuba in its intercourse with its neighbors. Spain's inability entails upon tile United States a degree of injury and suffering which can not longer be ignored.

Assuredly Spain can not expect the Government of the United States to sit idle letting vast interests suffer, our political elements be disturbed, and the country he perpetually embroiled, while no apparent progress is being made in the settlement of the Cuban problem. Such a policy of inaction by the United States would in reality prove of no benefit to Spain while certain to do the United States incalculable harm.

... I trust that Her Majesty's Government will believe in the unselfish friendliness of the desires of the United States and in the high purpose and sincere wish of the United States to give its aid only in order that a peaceful and enduring result may be reached, just and honorable alike to Spain and to the Cuban people, and only so far as such aid may accomplish the wished for ends. I can not disguise the gravity of the situation nor conceal the conviction of the President that should his present effort be fruitless his duty to his countrymen will necessitate an early decision as to the course of action which the time and the transcendent emergency may demand...”

STEWART L. WOODFORD.

Source: U.S. Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1898* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901), pp. 568-573

Question D: How is Woodford criticizing Spain's war efforts in paragraph 1?

Question E What is the unstated threat in paragraph 2?

Question F In paragraph 3, what assurances is the United States giving Spain?

Document 4: Front page of the New York Journal, February 17, 1898 after the sinking of the *USS Maine* on February 15, 1898.

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

EDITION FOR GREATER NEW YORK

NEW YORK JOURNAL

AND ADVERTISER.

NO. 3,372. PUBLISHED DAILY BY W. B. HEWITT—NEW YORK, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 1898.—16 PAGES. PRICE ONE CENT

\$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 cash for information, furnished in its entirety, that will reveal 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!

The New York Journal offers a reward of \$50,000 cash for information, furnished in its entirety, that will reveal the person or persons who sank the Maine.



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

Larger Explosive Device, the Journal's special correspondent at Havana, calls this is the secret opinion of many Spaniards in the Cuban capital that the Maine was destroyed and sunk off her nose by a mine of a submarine mine, or land 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. Mines connected the mine with a regular submarine mine, 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 to the fact that they were so cunning that they could sink the ship after all the men had rescued for the night. The Spaniards chose in the picture above where the mine may have been fired.

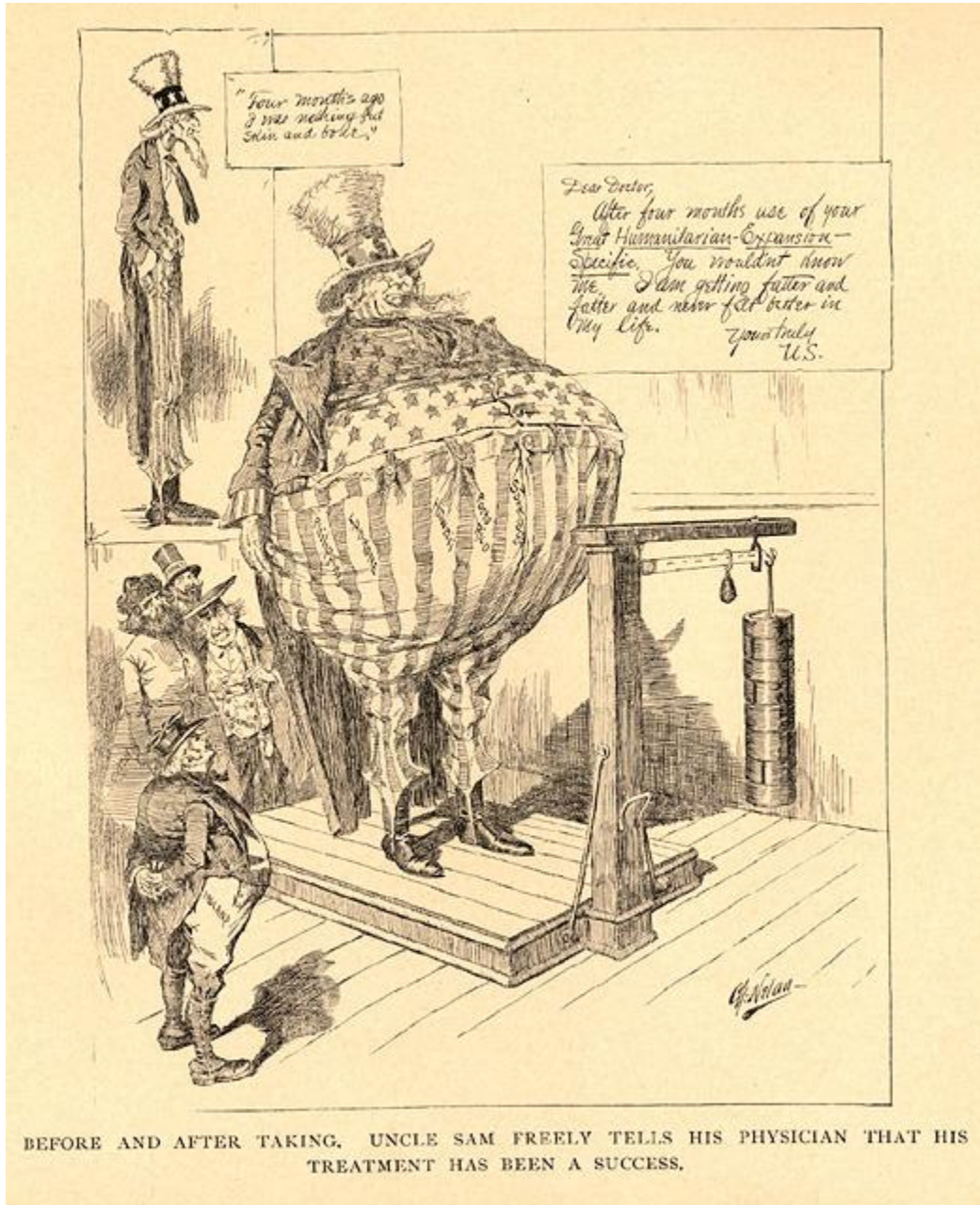
Hidden Mine or a Sunken Torpedo Believed to Have Been the Weapon Used Against the American Man-of-War—Officers and Men Tell Thrilling Stories of Being Blown Into the Air Amid a Mass of Shattered Steel and Exploding Shells—Survivors Brought to Key West Scout the Idea of Accident—Spanish Officials Protest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

The, War Ship *Maine* was Split in Two by an Enemy's Secret Infernal Machine".
New York Journal, February 17, 1898

Question G : What are the major headlines/headings?

Question H: What evidence or words are used to instill sensationalism or perhaps, propoganda?

Document 5:



Cartoon by Charles Nelan, 1898.

Captions:

"Four months ago I was nothing but skin and bones"

"Dear Doctor, After four months use of your Great Humanitarian-Expansion Specific, you wouldn't know me. I am getting fatter and fatter and never felt better in my life. Yours truly, U.S.

Question I: From the caption: "Before and after taking" what?

Question J: What is the tone of this political cartoon?

Document 6: The Teller Amendment (1898)

"hereby disclaims any disposition of intention to exercise sovereignty, jurisdiction, or control over said island except for pacification thereof, and asserts its determination, when that is accomplished, to leave the government and control of the island to its people."

Question K: What is the purpose of the Teller Amendment?

Document 7: The Platt Amendment (1903)

Whereas the Congress of the United States of America, by an Act approved March 2, 1901, provided as follows:

Provided further, That in fulfillment of the declaration contained in the joint resolution approved April twentieth, eighteen hundred and ninety-eight, entitled "For the recognition of the independence of the people of Cuba, demanding that the Government of Spain relinquish its authority and government in the island of Cuba, and withdraw its land and naval forces from Cuba and Cuban waters, and directing the President of the United States to use the land and naval forces of the United States to carry these resolutions into effect," the President is hereby authorized to "leave the government and control of the island of Cuba to its people" so soon as a government shall have been established in said island under a constitution which, either as a part thereof or in an ordinance appended thereto, shall define the future relations of the United States with Cuba, substantially as follows:

... III. That the government of Cuba consents that the United States may exercise 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,...

VII. That to enable the United States to maintain the independence of Cuba, and to protect the people thereof, as well as for its own defense, the government of Cuba will sell or lease to the United States lands necessary for coaling or naval stations at certain specified points to be agreed upon with the President of the United States."...

Question L: What power does the Platt Amendment give the United States over Cuba? (paragraph 1)

Question M: What are the provisions of Article III? (paragraph 2)

Question N: In Article VII, what is the United States allowed to establish in Cuba? (paragraph 3)
