

The Spanish-American War

How did yellow journalism start a war?

A Cuban revolt leads to war

Cuba was a Spanish colony for nearly 350 years. In 1895 the people of Cuba revolted against Spanish rule. Spain tried to stop the rebellion by imprisoning Cuban fighters in concentration camps. As violent skirmishes and poor living conditions in the concentration camps caused the death toll to rise, Americans debated whether to get involved.

America's response

Officially, the United States adopted a policy of neutrality. Many American businesses had money invested in Cuban sugar and mining industries and supported U.S. involvement to protect American business interests. Further, support for the **Monroe Doctrine** and a sense of America's growing importance in the world fueled calls for U.S. involvement. American newspapers, in particular the *New York World* and the *New York Journal*, sent journalists to Cuba to cover the story. They hoped that the Cuban conflict would increase newspaper sales.

President McKinley came into office in 1897 hoping to maintain a measured response to the Cuban conflict. In 1898 he dispatched the USS *Maine* to Cuba as a rescue vehicle for U.S. citizens who might be endangered by the conflict. The *Maine* was destroyed in a mysterious explosion on February 15, 1898. The U.S. press suspected a Spanish mine or torpedo had caused the explosion. By April, both the U.S. and Spain had declared war.



To explore the controversy more carefully, follow these directions and answer the questions below.

- Open Battleship Maine and scroll (past all the red links) to the Background heading.
- Read the first five paragraphs. Note: the term "magazines" in the description refers to military ammunition storage devices.
- Examine the images of the USS *Maine* before and after the explosion.

1 How many men died in the destruction of the USS *Maine*?



172



363



252



516

2 What did the U.S.Navy's inquiry into the cause of the explosion conclude?

3 Was the sinking of the USS *Maine* an appropriate reason to go to war?

**CONSIDER
this...**

You will be exploring the controversial sinking of the USS *Maine* and the press coverage that helped start a war. Open the panels below if you want a quick overview of key events and players in the Spanish-American War for context.

Teller Amendment

A 1898 resolution by Congress promising to grant Cuba independence after the war. It provided justification that the war was simply an imperialist effort by the U.S. to gain land.

General Valeriano Weyler

Known to many in Cuba as the "Butcher," Spain's General Weyler placed over 300,000 Cuban rebels into "reconcentration camps" during the Cuban rebellion of 1896. He failed to provide adequate food and these camps were full of disease and starvation. Thousands died.

Sinking of the USS *Maine*

On February 15, 1898, at 9:40 pm massive explosions sank the USS *Maine* in Havana Harbor, Cuba, killing over 250 people. Certain segments of the American public called for a war against Cuba's colonial overlord, Spain. One popular outcry was "Remember the *Maine*! To hell with Spain!"

Battle of Manila

On May 1, 1898, the U.S. defeated the Spanish fleet at Manila in the Philippines. It was a surprise attack with no American casualties. The Spanish-American War was fought in Cuba and Puerto Rico in the Caribbean, and Guam and the Philippines in Asia.

Rough Riders

This was the popularized name for U.S. cavalry volunteers who fought in the Spanish-American War (although most of their cavalry horses did not arrive in Cuba, and the Rough Riders actually fought on foot). Theodore Roosevelt led a contingent of the Rough Riders as they made a heroic charge up San Juan Hill. They suffered heavy casualties, but their bravery made them heroes.

Battle of San Juan Hill

On July 1, 1898, the Rough Riders, supported by two African-American regiments known as "Buffalo soldiers," charged this hill. This dangerous and heroic effort was celebrated despite the high casualty numbers.

Buffalo soldiers

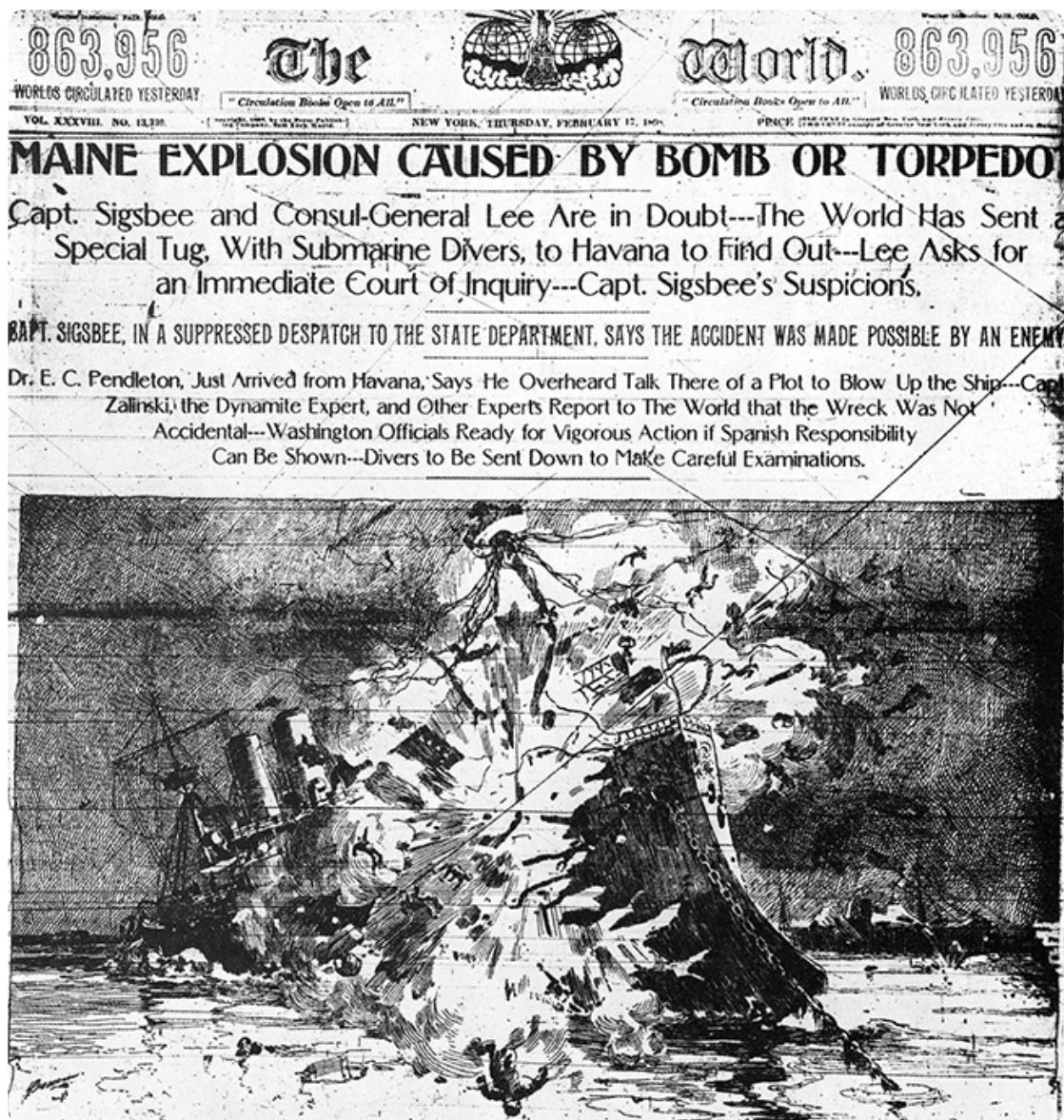
In 1866, Congress created four African-American regiments, the 9th and 10th Cavalry and the 24th and 25th Infantry, also known as the "Buffalo soldiers". Read more about their courageous service in the **Buffalo Soldiers** and the Spanish-American War.

Treaty of Paris, 1898

Signed on December 10, 1898, the Treaty of Paris officially ended the Spanish-American War. Cuba became independent. Spain gave the U.S. control over Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. The U.S. paid Spain an indemnity of \$20 million.

Yellow journalism?

What role did yellow journalism play in starting the Spanish-American War?



© The Granger Collection

Headline announcing the explosion that destroyed the USS *Maine*

Carefully investigate information from the following resources to answer the five W questions in the graphic below:

- Yellow Journalism
- The Spanish-American War: Yellow Journalism
- Open America: World Power and follow the directions below.
 - Select the America: World Power tab (at the top of the page).
 - Use the blue page-navigation buttons to go to pages 10 and 11.
 - Read the information provided on these two pages to complete the interactive point (iP: Hearst Pulitzer Cartoon) on page 11.

The 5 Ws of Yellow Journalism

(Note the use of "all caps" in the questions to replicate the urgency of the sensationalized headlines yellow journalism used throughout the Spanish-American War.)

WHAT IS IT?**WHO USED IT?****WHEN WAS IT USED?****WHY WAS IT USED?****WHERE DID IT GET THAT NAME?**

Kings of yellow journalism

Joseph Pulitzer, publisher of the *New York World*, and William Randolph Hearst, publisher of the *New York Journal* were the kings of promoting yellow journalism. Pulitzer and Hearst agreed that the key to selling a newspaper was an attention-grabbing emotional headline. Return to the Yellow Journalism site and select the Headline Gallery link on the left column to view actual headlines from 1898 newspapers and answer the questions that follow.

- 1 What sensationalized words with attention-grabbing or emotional appeal do you see in the 1898 Headline Gallery (select from menu at top left)?

- 2 Give examples of sensationalized language that could be (or is currently being) used in newspaper headlines (or tweet messages) today.

Can exaggeration start a war?



Some historians claim that the exaggerated reporting of Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst "started" the Spanish-American War. Write a short essay to support or

refute this argument and assess whether the various news and information outlets today use proper judgement in describing controversial actions that could lead to conflicts.