The Press and Spanish-American Relations in 1898

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Effects of the Press on Spanish-American Relations in 1898
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The Spanish-American War of 1898 marked a turning point in American history. Within a few years of the war's end, the United States was a world power, exercising control or influence over islands in the Caribbean Sea, the mid-Pacific Ocean and close to the Asian mainland. The conflict has sometimes been called "The Newspaper War," largely because the influence of a sensationalist press -- "Yellow Journalism" (see Yellow Journalism sidebar) -- supposedly brought on the fighting. Key to a sense of rage propagated by the media were the events of February 1898, which culminated with the destruction of an American battleship, the USS Maine, in a Cuban harbor. The media sensationalized the events in February and the two months following until war began, prompting a debate that still rages -- whether the press merely reflected the public's desire for war, or, in fact, actually fed it.

(Above, a late February 1898 San Francisco Examiner front page).

Historians say the outbreak of war had three principal sources: popular hostility to autocratic Spanish rule in Cuba; American sympathy with demands for Cuban independence (no doubt influenced by a desire for stability in the region); and a new spirit of national assertiveness in the United States, stimulated in part by a "jingoistic" or nationalistic and sensationalist press.1

Background/Early media coverage:

By the 1890s, Cuba and Puerto Rico were the only remnants of Spain's once vast empire in the New World, while the Philippine Islands comprised the core of Spanish power in the Pacific. In 1895, Cuba's growing wrath against the "tyranny" of its mother country burst into a war of independence. The next year, the Spanish appointed Gen. Valeriano Weyler -- soon nicknamed "Butcher" Weyler by William Randolph Hearst's New York Journal -- as commander of its forces in Cuba. (On Jan. 17, 1897, the Journal had ran a story titled: "Weyler throws nuns into prison. Butcher wages brutal warfare on helpless women." This was just one of many American press attacks on the general.2) Weyler began a policy known as reconcentrado, sort of a forerunner of the "strategic hamlets" policy established by American forces in the Vietnam War. People living in the countryside would be concentrated into camps, where they could be "defended" from the rebels -- and prevented from joining or supplying them.3

The Spanish Army had no way to supply adequate food or water to those camps and the suffering was great. Newspapers were estimating that by 1898 more than 400,000 Cubans -- almost a quarter of the island's population -- had died during the revolution. The number was probably about half that, but it didn't matter to the press, the damage was done.4 American papers showed drawings of emaciated Cuban children, reported on atrocities and many mass executions of prisoners and sympathizers in the camps. Although there was some exaggeration, many of the reported events were true.5
Weyler was eventually reassigned due to pressure upon the Spanish government. However, the newspapers didn't let up. Stories about the Cuban rebellion sold papers, and continued to appear. Every little bit drew public attention.

The Humboldt Times carried this Associated Press story on Feb. 16, 1898:

**A Female Insurgent Captured**

"Havana, Feb. 15 -- Seniorita Isabelle Rubio, an Amazon, was captured, after being wounded, in a skirmish between a detachment of Spanish troops and some insurgents. She joined the insurgents at the invitation of the late Antonio Maceo. She belongs to a prominent family."

Papers went to great lengths to get reporters onto the island. Hearst hired yachts to transport correspondents to Cuba. When the Journal's Carl Decker was dropped off at an insurgent camp, Spanish officials threatened to seize the offending boat. However, a stern warning from the U.S. Consul-General to Cuba, Fitzhugh Lee, saying the yacht might be an American warship because it carried a cannon prevented the seizure.

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 Reflipe 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.

The United States watched the course of the uprising with mounting concern. Most Americans were sympathetic with the Cubans (especially as the United States had about $30-50 million in Cuban investments and as much as $100 million in import-export trade in 1896), but President Grover Cleveland was determined to preserve neutrality. For a while, continuing until the administration of the new president, William McKinley, America was able to do so. But clamor for intervention continued to rise and the yellow press would not let the issue die.

Finally, in February of 1898, two incidents put Spain and the United States onto an inescapable path to war. The press was heavily involved in both.

**February 1898**

Tensions were raised on February 9 when Hearst's New York Journal and San Francisco Examiner published a letter from the Spanish minister to the United States, Enrique Dupuy de Lôme, to Jose Canalejas, an influential Spanish editor and politician, which contained derogatory references to McKinley. A Cuban junta had smuggled away and then ferried the letter to both the Journal and Joseph Pulitzer's New York World. In the missive, de Lôme said McKinley was "weak and catering to the rabble, and besides a low politician who desires to leave a door open to me and to stand well with the jingoes of his party."

The newspapers had a field day. The Examiner's headline shouted "Spain's Minister Insults The American President," and made a point to play up an excerpt from the letter that seemed to insult the Journal's reporters. The Journal called it "The Worst Insult to the United States in its History," reprinted the letter in full and the next day called de Lôme "abusive." De Lôme himself had been immediately
recalled in order to prevent more embarrassment for Madrid after Spain learned the letter would be publicized. The American public's outrage was severe.

The Humboldt Times of Feb. 10 ran a number of Associated Press stories regarding the matter, including one mentioning the Spanish minister writing "discourteously" of McKinley and the following dispatch relating U.S. Congressional reaction:

"Washington, Feb. 9 -- Oratory in behalf of the Cuban insurgents occupied three hours time of the Senate to-day. Elaborate speeches were delivered by Cannon, of Utah, and Mason, of Illinois, in advocation of the resolution they introduced yesterday calling upon the President to bring the Cuban war to a close. Hale, of Maine, addressed the Senate briefly, urging the Senate to uphold the policy of the administration, with which Mason, though a Republican, did not agree."

As if to further illustrate the rising tensions, on Feb. 10 the Examiner ran -- in a very accurate prediction -- a brief front page story headlined, "Porto Rico the point of attack." The article said "It is understood that in case of war with Spain the Administration's military and naval programme includes the immediate seizure of Porto (sic) Rico, as well as the investment of Cuba. Believing the war would be an extremely short one, it would be advisable that Porto Rico should be held ... in order to completely dispose of Spanish title possessions in the Western Hemisphere."

It was less than a week later when then seminal blow came. On Feb. 15 -- the same day the Examiner asked in a front page editorial, "Is the United States Preparing for War?" -- the U.S. warship Maine was destroyed while lying at anchor in Havana harbor, under circumstances that are still unclear. More than 250 men were killed, and an outburst of indignation, intensified by sensationalized press coverage, swept across the country.

The Maine had arrived in Cuba on Jan. 25, 1898 and its visit had largely been without incident, save for a few Spanish complaints. One, reported on Valentine's Day 1898 in the San Francisco Examiner (two days before the ship was to blow up), indicated Madrid thought the visit encouraged the rebels. "Warship Maine Braces Cubans -- Such is the Complaint Made by Spaniards at Havana," read the page three headline.

Of course, the story was overshadowed that day by a story by Hearst correspondent Julian Hawthorne -- son of Nathaniel Hawthorne, author of The Scarlet Letter. The story was printed under a headline that read:

Cuban Babes Prey to Famine
Thousands of Children of the Reconcentrados Perishing in Island Towns
Sights that Sicken Strong Men

Spaniards were described as "more pitiless than Kurds," and buzzards were floating over the dying, according to the article. Hawthorne wrote that "All around ... squatted little forms whose days of schooling were done forever in this world. All they could do was to endure a few days or hours longer the dull gnawing pain and exhaustion, and then sink noiselessly into nothingness ... The victims of starvation appear to succumb more easily and quickly than do the Hindoos (sic), who to be sure are in the habit of starving all their lives."
Newspaper drawings such as the one at left, allegedly showing reconcentrado victims seen by Sen. William Proctor of Vermont, helped contribute to the hysteria.

Meanwhile, both Capt. Charles Sigsbee, commanding the battleship, and Consul-General Lee reported favorable reactions to the presence of the Maine. On Feb. 1, 1898, Sigsbee reported, "In my opinion the arrival of the Maine has caused the United States Government to dominate the situation. It has reduced to absurdity the warnings and implied threats published from Spanish sources previous to the arrival of the vessel."  

Secretary of the Navy John D. Long said that President McKinley authorized the Maine's trip to Havana "in view of the possibility of danger to American life and property, some means of protection should be at hand." Long himself thought it wise policy to send the warship before an emergency developed, rather than afterwards. "I hope with all my heart," he said, "that everything will turn out all right."

He was wrong. At about 9:40 p.m. on Feb. 15, George Bronson Rea of Harper's Weekly and a friend were seated in a café near Havana's central park when they were rocked in their seats by a terrific explosion. Windows collapsed in a tinkling of glass and even doors were shaken from their bolts.8 "The populace were evidently frightened," Rea wrote, "probably believing the explosion was but the forerunner of another riot, and very few essayed to leave their doors and venture into the street."

According to the Associated Press (as published in the Feb. 17 issue of the Humboldt Times), "The explosion put out the street lights and blew down the telephone and telegraph wires throughout the city."

Reporters not only made their way to the dock to discover that the Maine (below, in a U.S. Navy photo taken before the explosion) was a wreck, they also made sure America knew about it in the morning. Hurried dispatches came in to the papers in the wee hours of the morning and the clichéd "stop the presses" was yelled all across the country.

Surprisingly, the yellow press generally was factual and cautious during the first few hours after the explosion, even though the Examiner placed on the cover: "The Question on Every Lip is, 'Did a Spanish Torpedo Do the Awful Work?'" Universally printed was Capt. Sigsbee's telegram to the Navy Department which included official notice of the explosion and a warning that "public notice should be suspended until further report."

The World went so far as to write in the body of its main story, "There is some doubt as to whether the explosion took place ON the Maine."

"Most of the naval officers believe the explosion resulted from a spontaneous explosion in the coal bunkers," reported AP (via the Humboldt Times of Feb. 17). Also listed as possible causes were a boiler explosion or overheating of an iron partition between the boilers and the ship's ammunition magazine.

"I cannot determine the cause, but competent investigators will decide whether the explosion was produced from internal or external causes," Sigsbee told the AP the same day. "I can offer no conjecture until after an investigation has been made."
One of the few major newspapers not to play the story big in its early edition was the San Francisco Chronicle. Nevertheless, by the afternoon, the Chronicle had come out with an extra edition that proclaimed, "The Maine is Blown to Bits." However, the Chronicle was not as quick to assign blame as other papers and in fact made sure to mention that Spanish boats were assisting in rescue efforts. A quote from de Lôme, "This is dreadful ... it cannot be the result of any Spanish agency at all," was even included. Two days later, the Chronicle joined those publicizing the so-called "torpedo theory."

By the 17th, the Hearst papers, at least, had given up all pretense of believing the explosion was an accident. "MAINE BLOWN UP BY TORPEDO" with small type reading "Such is the belief now gaining ground" and "May Have been anchored over a mine" underneath graced the cover of that day's Examiner, which publicized the Journal's offer of $50,000 for "information furnished to them exclusively which shall lead to the detection and conviction of the person, or persons, or Government criminals which resulted in the destruction at Havana of the United States warship Maine."

While the Journal asserted in the biggest type available that the Maine had been purposely blown up, the World just hinted at it. Its front page banner on Feb. 17 ended with a question mark: "Maine explosion caused by bomb or torpedo?" In the story's body, the World's correspondent wrote, "All is conjecture, uncertainty, excitement."

Actually, to the yellow press, one thing did seem certain: war was inevitable. Newspaper headlines trumpeted this, and stories about the military appeared almost every day in many papers. The San Francisco Examiner not only showed where military bases in the Bay Area were, but also presented plans for mining the Golden Gate should the Spanish fleet sail from the Philippines. "If There Was Treachery, Spain Must Do Battle," was one typical headline.

On March 21, an American court of inquiry held that a submarine mine, set off by persons unknown, had caused the forward magazines to explode, the force of which sank the ship. The next day, a Spanish inquiry predictably came to a different conclusion: internal causes caused the magazines to explode. The Spanish report listed several pieces of evidence: the failure of a geyser of water to shoot up; the lack of dead fish in the area of the wreck; and, the lack of opportunity for anyone to place a mine near the ship. The Chronicle was one of the few papers giving credence to that report. Others called the Spanish version (pardon the pun), "a fish story."

As the popular clamor grew following the Maine's destruction, some began taking notice of the yellow papers' role. A leading journalist, Edwin L. Godkin of the Nation, chastised both Heart's Journal and Pulitzer's World. "Nothing so disgraceful as the behavior of ... these newspapers in the past week has been known in the history of American journalism." Secretary Long of the Navy noted, "Underneath there is an intense excitement. The slightest spark is liable to result in war with Spain."

The Associated Press, as early as February 18, had felt compelled to send a dispatch (printed in the Humboldt Times among other papers) in view of the "sensational rumors in various papers of the country." Such debunked rumors, in the confusion after the Maine's explosion, included the cruiser USS New York had not been sent to Havana, U.S. Counsel-General Fitzhugh Lee had not been assassinated, and Congress was not in special session (at the time, at least) in the hours immediately after the explosion.

On the way to war

Now it seemed the extraordinary public reaction to the sinking of the Maine was forcing the president to consider making new demands of the Spanish government. Historian David Trask says that no one in the Administration would have entertained the possibility of war, had it not been for the ungovernable uproar throughout the country that followed the destruction of the Maine.

Not to be excluded, the even-then respectable New York Times began to get war fever. On March 6, in the midst of several days worth of "Maine explosion still unsolved"-like headlines, the Times printed a
small front-page story headlined, "Madrid Press Feels Alarm: Talk of Destroying American Commerce and of Sending An Army to the United States." In the same edition, a story about fortifications being built in Puget Sound, Wash. (of all places) mentioned that "High authorities do not expect war, on the contrary the military (say) they do not expect an emergency." 11

The same day, the World put more pressure on the government with a story declaring, "American Women Ready to Give up Husbands, Sons and Sweethearts to Defend Nation's Honor." More than 100 women, from Albany to Buffalo to New Orleans, had been questioned for the article.

Even local papers wouldn't stop the jingoism. In the "Local Happenings" section of the April 12, 1898 Humboldt Times, it was noticed that it had been 27 years to the day that Fort Sumter had been bombarded and the American Civil War began. It followed up that notice by saying:

"How patriotic Americans would like to hear the cannon's reverberation on this 12th of April to avenge the slaughter of the boys in blue on board the Maine in Havana's harbor two months ago." 12

Advertising got into the act as well. On the front page of the same edition, an ad for Connick and Cousins Wholesalers in Eureka (Third and G streets) said the following:

"DON'T WAIT TILL THE WAR

"is over or until prices advance on eatables before you lay in a supply of the necessaries in that line."

McKinley had been seeking cease fires between Spain and the Cuban rebels, as well as autonomy for Cuba, for months. Now he was being overwhelmed by popular opinion. Public pressure for war continued to grow, which led to more newspaper stories about public pressure, which in turn led to even more public pressure. With this vicious circle expanding almost exponentially, Congress -- and much of the American public -- was becoming impatient with McKinley's negotiating. In a step which may seem unusual in this day of War Powers Acts and questioning whether the president has authority to send out American troops without Congressional approval, Congress very nearly took the curious action of sending troops to war without the president's approval (as in the New York Journal cover below).

According to The War With Spain in 1898, by David Trask, McKinley finally asked for authority to intervene in Cuba because he no longer felt able to resist the manifold pressures that poured in upon him, especially from representatives of his party in Congress reflecting the passions of their constituents.

In Trask's book, Janet Hobart, wife of Vice President Garrett Hobart, recalled a conversation between her husband and McKinley in late April 1898:

"The vice president reported, 'Mr. President, I can no longer hold back the Senate. They will act if you do not act at once.' McKinley then asked, 'Do you mean that the Senate will declare war on its own motion?' When (the vice president) replied in the affirmative, McKinley exclaimed, 'Say no more!'" 13

McKinley apparently asked Congress for a war declaration just in time. Newspapers were lobbying the legislature to make the declaration itself. The Examiner/ Journal were running stories with headlines such as, "Americans Look to Congress to Save the Nation's Honor," (April 12).

If there ever was a "popular war" -- one forced upon a
reluctant leadership by the people -- it was this one. The views of the voters, as refracted through Congress, found expression in April 1898 only after President McKinley had unsuccessfully called upon all of his political skill to frustrate them.12

Madrid had also attempted to delay the inevitable. But by April, fatalistic attitudes prevailed, and in the face of imminent intervention in Cuba, Spain declared war on April 23. The U.S. Congress reciprocated on April 25 with a declaration retroactive to April 21 -- a step designed to legitimize a blockade of Cuba that began to organize that day. The yellow press, of course, presented the declaration in a very favorable light. As the declaration came, the Examiner was trumpeting "The Triumph of New Journalism" in stories about the onset of the conflict.

It seems that what compelled McKinley to act against his deepest desire for peace was the irresistible popular public demand welling up all over America after the destruction of the Maine. Such pressure was picked up upon and played with by the press until it seemed as if newspapers were making foreign policy.

Not to say any of this was unexpected. The U.S. War Department had possessed contingency plans for war with Spain for years. Future President Theodore Roosevelt had a lot of enthusiasm for the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) as assistant secretary of the Navy in 1897-98. The ONI, like Roosevelt, was committed to the construction of a great U.S. battle fleet to dominate to Western Hemisphere and project American power into the world beyond. Roosevelt wrote in December 1897, "The Chief of the Office of Naval Intelligence has got to be the man on whom we rely for initiating strategic work." ONI, with Roosevelt's active support, performed what he called "invaluable work ... in formulating and preparing plans of action for the war with Spain."13

The Kimball Plan, completed by ONI in June 1897, called for naval blockades of Cuba and Manila, both prominent features of American strategy when war began in April 1898. It, although modified extensively prior to and during the war, served as the military's main plan during the conflict.

When President McKinley went reluctantly to war, Roosevelt was unable to contain his enthusiasm and resigned from the Navy Department to fight in Cuba as lieutenant colonel of the "Rough Riders," a volunteer cavalry regiment which he recruited himself.

(Right: An imaginative drawing by famous artist Fredric Remington -- drawn for Hearst -- allegedly showing searches the Spanish conducted on American ships going to Cuba.)

**Ethnic minorities, war and the press**

Even in times of national emergency, the press couldn't ignore the then-rampant anti-Asian racism in California and the nation as a whole. On March 4, 1898, the Humboldt Times reprinted a New York Press story saying that "Japs are Excluded" from serving in "our" U.S. Navy.

In view of the fact that there were several Japanese on board the Maine when it was blown up, it is interesting to learn the government has adopted a method that will keep them out of our navy.

The story goes on saying the Japanese sailors, in performing menial tasks for the Americans and joining
the Navy using their "industry and intelligence" would learn skills which later would serve the Japanese navy.

When some of them were killed on the *Maine*, valuable men and useful information which were to have been used for Japan's benefit were destroyed.

It will be about her last chance to get either indemnity or info by way of our navy. The government has passed a rule that men admitted to the navy must be more than 5 feet, 4 inches tall. Navy officers say that will exclude the Japs.

Outside the mainstream, the war and its buildup were also covered extensively by smaller local and special audience papers. Although Congress certainly wasn't influenced as much by minorities as it was by the mainstream white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant readership of the yellow press, ethnic newspapers still played key roles in presenting -- and directing -- non-white opinion.

The Washington, D.C., *Bee* -- a black newspaper -- called for caution in assigning blame after the explosion of the *Maine* and urged the government to show restraint, yet pointed out that the consequences for the Spanish would be severe if the Iberian nation was found responsible. On Feb. 19, 1898, it wrote:

> The serious catastrophe which took place near Havana on Tuesday, by which hundreds of valiant seamen and millions of property in the shape of one of the best gunboats in the Navy were destroyed, calls for a most searching scrutiny on the part of the American government. The circumstances under which the explosion took place, while they do not point directly to an overt act of violence on the part of the Spanish authorities, yet considering the hostile feeling in Spain to America, this country ought to be certain that Spain completely exonerates herself. In case Spain is responsible... full indemnity for lives lost and property destroyed as well as something more for her smartness [can be demanded], although, in our opinion, Mr. McKinley would be little less than inclined to insist upon thrashing Spain and in addition demanding the necessary indemnity. The President, however, is not to be inveigled into war by the Jingoism so freely indulged in by some blustering Americans. He will be sure that he is right and will then act accordingly. There will be a hot time if Spain did it.

On the same day in Cleveland, the *Gazette* -- another black paper -- encouraged African-Americans to fight for the United States. The *Gazette* hoped that blacks, by showing they were willing to fight for white America, would be further accepted into society by white Americans. At the same time, the *Gazette* seemed to echo more mainstream papers in its jingoism:

> The destruction of the *Maine* was a crime against this nation not yet fully realized; but gradually the civilized world is being awakened to a sense of the appalling deed. No foreign power can justly sympathize with Spain in its base and cowardly treachery. None of the European nations can regard the act with mitigating allowance without compromising its own national honor. Spain has wickedly sinned against Christian civilization and must atone for its offending. Two hundred and twenty-five white Americans and thirty-three Afro-Americans have been wantonly murdered. The colored men of America have immense interests at stake. As a citizen and patriot, let him make common cause with the people and again prove himself an element of strength and power in vindicating the honor and claims of his country in the hour of the nation's peril. The cause of this government is our cause. If die we must, let us die defending a just cause.
Of course, there were dissenters. Then, as now, some thought problems at home should be solved before getting involved in problems overseas. On Feb. 24, 1898, the *Kansas City American Citizen* criticized some legislators for looking outside the United States when the *American Citizen* thought they should look inward:

Let this government see that all laws are obeyed by our fire-eating southerners before going to war with Spain or any other country ...

The southern statesmen who plead for Cuba could learn a valuable lesson by looking around their own bloodcurdling confines of butchery. The Constitution of the United States declares that each state shall be guaranteed a republican form of government, etc. There is about as much respect for the Constitution of the United States in the southern states as there is for the Bible in Hades.

The *Bee*, on Feb. 26, however, not only called for war as strongly as the "yellow papers" if Spain was discovered to have blown up the *Maine*, but like the *Gazette* called upon blacks to volunteer:

Indications point to treachery of the most malignant type in the case of the destruction of the *Maine*. In case Spanish duplicity has gone so far as to blow up the *Maine* there is nothing to do but declare war, whip the rascals and make Spain pay for all of the trouble she has caused. Spanish threats can do nothing to bluff this country and it matters but little what speculators may do or say, there will be a hot time if Spain did it. The thousands of patriotic Americans of Caucasian blood who are willing to go to war will be supplemented by thousands of colored men who will vie with them in patriotism and bravely on the field of battle. If he is given but a fair show, the colored volunteer will put up as bold and solid a front, work up to the approved tactics and capture as many flags, positions and men as a given number of his white compatriots will dare do. Let President McKinley and Congress say the word and recruiting will be a land-office business.

Abraham Cahan (1860-1951), who for more than 40 years served as editor of the New York Yiddish-language newspaper Jewish Daily Forward (Yiddish title *Forverts*), wrote stories for the New York Commercial Advertiser during the war. Cahan gave the Commercial Advertisers' readers information on the opinions of newly-arrived immigrants who lived on New York's east side. In this excerpt from Feb. 22, Cahan notes that some people were noticing the media's intense effect on public opinion:

"The American people are all right," he was saying, sawing the air with his long-stemmed German pipe, "but they give some of their papers too much license. If this country is to have war, let us have it, by all means... But these things must be decided by the elected representatives of the people, and not by a self-constituted authority in the form of a sensational press.

"The Yankee strikes me as a fighter par excellence. He is used to fight, and to win, and
nothing seems easier than to precipitate war upon this nation. Why, look at my boys. They are Germans by parentage, but they were born here, and yet they are full of fight, and ever since the Maine catastrophe was reported they have restlessly talked of nothing but war and of their inclination to join the Navy. All you want is to fan this feeling, to stimulate it by foolish war cries, such as some of the papers have been shouting to raise their circulation."

In a story -- headlined "The God of Israel is Getting Even With Them" -- published on May 14, 1898, soon after the outbreak of war, Cahan wrote about the buildup of war hysteria in the New York Jewish ghetto. One observer claimed the war was revenge for the Spanish Inquisition:

The ghetto never does things by halves, and its war feeling manifests itself with an oriental exuberance which keeps the neighborhood in a constant effervescence of excitement. The crowds in front of the bulletin boards of the four Yiddish dailies in this world within a world are not quite so large, perhaps, as the throngs on Park Row, but this numerical inferiority is more than made up in violence of gesticulation and vehemence of verbal expression. The Jews are glad to see Spain defeated. They have a double reason for it. Apart from considering themselves Americans and loving their adopted country... the unhappy children of Israel find out that they have an old account to settle with the Spaniards.

"Serve them right! Serve them right!" said a patriarchal old tailor, upon hearing of Manila. 'They tortured the Jews and banished them from their homes and now the God of Israel is getting even with them. It is an old story, more than four hundred years old, but the High One never forgets, you know...

"(T)he Lord could have smashed them long ago, and even now He could have made some other power the messenger of Spain's ruin. Why should it fall to the lot of the United States to settle her? You don't know? I will tell you. Who should avenge the blood of Israel? Russia, which is as bad to the Jews as Spain was? Germany, Austria or any other country which is as eaten up with anti-Semitism as a bad apple is with worms? England is not a bad country, but what good does she do our people? The United States is the only land that has been a real mother to us. So God thought he might give the Americans the job. The friends of Israel getting square on His enemies, see?"

War

The war with Spain itself was swift and decisive. During the four months it lasted, not a single American reverse of any importance occurred. A week after the declaration of war, Commodore George Dewey, then at Hong Kong, proceeded with his squadron of six vessels to the Philippines. His orders were to prevent the Spanish fleet based there from operating in American waters. He caught the entire Spanish fleet at anchor and destroyed it without losing an American life.

Meanwhile, in Cuba, troops landed near Santiago, where -- after winning a rapid series of engagements -- they fired on the port. Four armored Spanish cruisers steamed out of Santiago Bay and a few hours later were reduced to ruined hulks. From Boston to San Francisco, whistles blew and flags waved when word came that Santiago had fallen.

During the conflict, newspapers had dispatched correspondents to Cuba and the Philippines, who trumpeted the renown of the nation's new heroes. Chief among them were Dewey of Manila fame and Roosevelt. Spain soon sued for peace, and in the treaty signed on Dec. 10, 1898, transferred Cuba to the United States for temporary occupation preliminary to the island's independence. In addition, Spain ceded Puerto Rico and Guam in lieu of war indemnity, and the Philippines on payment of $20 million.

Aftermath
Can the newspapers be blamed for forming the public opinions that led into the Spanish-American War? Probably -- almost certainly -- not. But the yellow press brought those opinions out and amplified them. The press reported the growing hysteria, in the process causing it to grow even more. Hearst, Pulitzer, et al. were certainly provocative in their papers. Congress, bowing to public pressure symbolized by the media, had no choice but to seek war. In doing so, it led McKinley into seeking war as well. Thus, at least indirectly, the press was responsible for the conflict. So it would not be inaccurate to refer to the Spanish-American War as, "The Newspaper War."

Can the newspapers exert such an effect on American foreign policy today? Maybe -- it is a fine line between reporting public opinion and making it. Although today's newspaper readers may think they're more sophisticated, the point can be argued. Certainly such "news" sources as "Hard Copy," "Inside Edition," and certain London tabloids could -- in a way -- be labeled "yellow journalism." It would do the public well to be wary.

Footnotes


2. In this document -- unless specified otherwise -- quoted newspaper information is usually taken directly from the newspaper itself, or a reproduction.

3. Weyler's reconcentration order of Oct. 21, 1896 for Pinar del Río, was typical: All people outside of a designated line were to remove themselves to be within it by eight days. Anyone who failed to comply would be treated as a rebel. It was illegal to move provisions between towns without permission of the military. Those whole violated this rule were to be tried as abettors of the insurrection. Owners of beef cattle were to take their animals to towns where they could receive protection. David Trask, The War with Spain in 1898, (1981) page 495.


5. "Accounts of atrocities resulting from Spanish treatment of individuals were occasionally fabricated; more often they were verifiable. The horrors of the reconcentrado policy were abundantly documented." Lewis L. Gould, The Presidency of William McKinley, (1980) page 62.


7. ibid, page 25.


9. Trask, page 35

10. ibid, page 56

11. One more interesting note about that edition of the New York Times: On page 5, there is a short blurb mentioning, "The plan for holding a Pan-American exhibition at Buffalo has been shelved for the present owing to the unsettled condition of the public mind consequent upon the Spanish-Cuban complications." President McKinley was assassinated at the Pan-American Exhibition when it was finally held in 1901.

12. Trask, page 64

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Microsoft Encarta 97 Encyclopedia; CD ROM. Copyright 1996 by Microsoft.

Encyclopedia Britannica Online; [www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com). Via the Internet.

Newspapers directly examined on paper or microfilm:
Humboldt *Times*, New York *Times*, San Francisco *Chronicle*, San Francisco *Examiner*

Other quoted newspapers and magazines were reproduced in the books above.

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