



## SPANISH AMERICAN WAR

### TEXTBOOK

#### War Fever Escalates

In 1896, Spain responded to the Cuban revolt by sending General Valeriano Weyler to Cuba to restore order. Weyler tried to crush the rebellion by herding the entire rural population of central and western Cuba into barbed wire concentration camps. Here civilians could not give aid to rebels. An estimated 300,000 Cubans filled these camps, where thousands died from hunger and disease.

**Headline Wars** Weyler's actions fueled a war over newspaper circulation that had developed between the American newspaper tycoons William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer. To lure readers, Hearst's *New York Journal* and Pulitzer's *New York World* printed exaggerated accounts—by reporters such as James Creelman—of “Butcher” Weyler's brutality. Stories of poisoned wells and of children being thrown to the sharks deepened American sympathy for the rebels. This sensational style of writing, which exaggerates the news to lure and enrage readers, became known as **yellow journalism**.

Hearst and Pulitzer fanned war fever. When Hearst sent the gifted artist Frederic Remington to Cuba to draw sketches of reporters' stories, Remington informed the publisher that a war between the United States and Spain seemed very unlikely. Hearst reportedly replied, “You furnish the pictures and I'll furnish the war.”

**The De Lôme Letter** American sympathy for “Cuba Libre!” grew with each day's headlines. When President William McKinley took office in 1897, demands for American intervention in Cuba were on the rise. Preferring to avoid war with Spain, McKinley tried diplomatic means to resolve the crisis. At first, his efforts appeared to succeed. Spain recalled General Weyler, modified the policy regarding concentration camps, and offered Cuba limited self-government.

In February 1898, however, the *New York Journal* published a private letter written by Enrique Dupuy de Lôme, the Spanish minister to the United States. A Cuban rebel had stolen the letter from a Havana post office and leaked it to the newspaper, which was thirsty for scandal. The de Lôme letter criticized President McKinley, calling him “weak” and “a bidder for the admiration of the crowd.” The embarrassed Spanish

government apologized, and the minister resigned. Still, Americans were angry over the insult to their president.

**The U.S.S. Maine Explodes** Only a few days after the publication of the de Lôme letter, American resentment toward Spain turned to outrage. Early in 1898, President McKinley had ordered the *U.S.S. Maine* to Cuba to bring home American citizens in danger from the fighting and to protect American property. On February 15, 1898, the ship blew up in the harbor of Havana. More than 260 men were killed.

At the time, no one really knew why the ship exploded; however, American newspapers claimed that the Spanish had blown up the ship. The *Journal's* headline read "The warship *Maine* was split in two by an enemy's secret infernal machine." Hearst's paper offered a reward of \$50,000 for the capture of the Spaniards who supposedly had committed the outrage.

### **War with Spain Erupts**

Now there was no holding back the forces that wanted war. "Remember the *Maine!*" became the rallying cry for U.S. intervention in Cuba. It made no difference that the Spanish government agreed, on April 9, to almost everything the United States demanded, including a six-month cease-fire.

Despite the Spanish concessions, public opinion favored war. On April 11, McKinley asked Congress for authority to use force against Spain. After a week of debate, Congress agreed, and on April 20 the United States declared war.

Source: *The Americans: Reconstruction to the 21st Century* (California Edition). (2006) Eds. Gerald, Danzer, J. Jorge Klor de Alva, Larry S. Krieger, Louis E. Wilson, and Nancy Woloch. McDougal Littell. pp. 347-8.