A "Splendid Little War": The United States, Imperialism, and the Spanish American War

American History Trinity School

Cuba



Revolution in Cuba

- Last major European colony in Latin America
- US: economic interests
- Strategic interest for any country interested in a Central American canal
- 1880s: Spanish control became especially harsh
- 1895: Cuban people launched revolt against Spain
- Spain cut off rebels from civilian supporters
 - "Reconcentration camps"
 - Death from starvation, disease

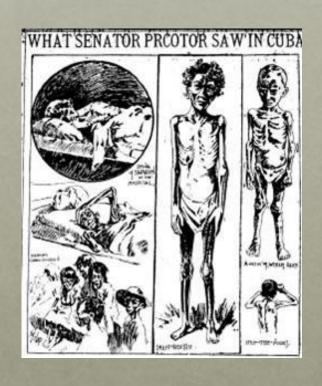
Fanning the Flames

- New York World:
- "Blood on the roadsides, blood on the fields, blood on the doorsteps, blood, blood, blood! The old, the young, the weak, the crippled—all are butchered without mercy. Is there no nation wise enough, brave enough to aid this blood-smitten land?"

Intervention: Broad-Based Support

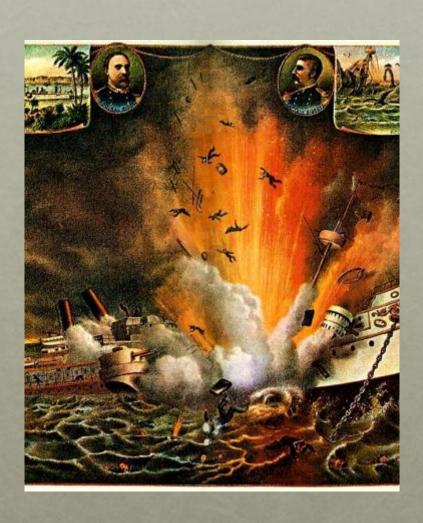
- Stop the carnage
- Protect U.S. investments
- Expansionists supported intervention
- Populists petitioned Congress to support the Cuban people in seeking independence from colonial rule
- Election of 1896: both parties endorsed Cuban independence

Journalism and War





The USS Maine



- Feb. 15, 1898, 9:40 pm, Havana Harbor
- Sudden explosion lit up the sky
- Crew of 355: 260 dead
- Unknown cause

Yellow Journalism & The Maine



Yellow Journalism & The Maine



US Declares War

- April 25, 1898: U.S. declares war on Spain
- Teller Amendment (Apr. 20, 1898)
 - US could not annex Cuba
 - Intervention = leave "control of the island to the people"
 - Attached to the war resolution
 - Most interventionists were not imperialists
- Congress refused to approve
 - Hawaiian annexation
 - Canal in Latin America

Becoming an Imperial Power

- War with Spain created opportunity to occupy Philippines
- McKinley's rationale for occupying Philippines
 - 1. Strengthen US political and commercial position in East Asia
 - 2. Filipinos "poorly suited" to self-rule
 - 3. Germany or Japan might seize if US did not
 - #2 and 3 were new & unprecedented justifications for US intervention

The March of the Flag

- Albert Beveridge, Senator from Indiana (1899–1911)
- "March of Flag" campaign speech, 1898:
 - "Duty" and "destiny" to spread American Christian capitalism overseas
 - "The ocean does not separate us from lands of our duty and desire—the oceans join us. . . . Cuba not contiguous? Porto Rico not contiguous! Hawaii and the Philippines not contiguous! The oceans make them contiguous. And our navy will make them contiguous."
- Reconceptualized Manifest Destiny to int'l context
- Expanded frontier thesis beyond US borders

Philippine-American War

- Feb 4, 1890 (two days before US signed Treaty of Paris):
 - Fighting broke out between American forces and Filipino nationalists
 - Filipinos: independence, not a change in colonial rulers.
- Philippine-American War lasted 3 years
 - Dead: 4,200 American and 20,000+ Filipino combatants
 - 200,000 Filipino civilians died from violence, famine, and disease
- Philippines = American colony until gained independence in 1946

US Victory in Cuba

- Army finally landed in June 1898
 - Busy in Philippines
- Small regular army + militias, volunteers
 - Rough Riders: cavalry unit of cowboys & eastern dandies led by T. Roosevelt
- July 3: US Navy destroyed obsolete Spanish squadron
 - Isolated Spanish army; guaranteed defeat
- US then seized nearby Spanish colony of Puerto Rico
- August 12, 1898: Spain signed armistice

Hawaii

- President McKinley:
 - "We need Hawaii just as much and a good deal more than we needed California. It is Manifest Destiny."
- New York Sun
 - "To maintain the flag in the Philippines, we must raise our flag in Hawaii."
- July 1898: Congress approved annexing Hawaii
 - Welcomed by white minority
 - Protests by native people; annexation without consent

Treaty of Paris

- Spain agreed to
 - Accept Cuban independence
 - Cede Puerto Rico and Guam to US
 - Cede Philippines to US (separately decided)

Roosevelt Corollary

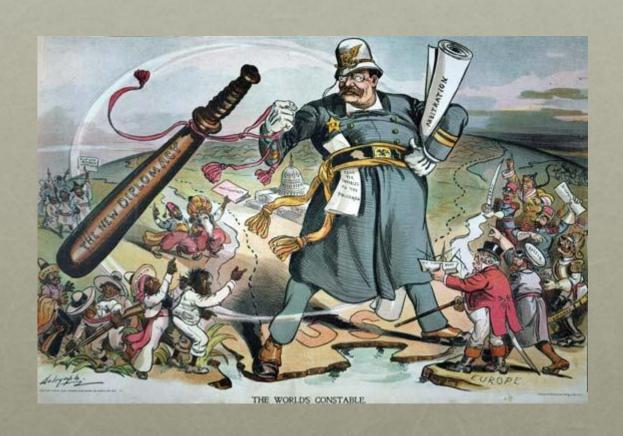
- 1823: Monroe Doctrine
 - Western Hemisphere was now closed to Europe
 - No additional European colonization or interference
- 1904: Roosevelt Corollary to Monroe Doctrine
 - US had right to intervene if a European country threatened or attempted to seize a country in the Western Hemisphere
 - US sphere of interest extended beyond national borders



As the U.S. entered the $20^{\rm th}$ century . . .

"A Splendid Little War"

The World's Policeman?



U.S. Enters 20th Century

- Expanded Manifest Destiny to int'l context
- Expanded frontier thesis to int'l context
 - Beveridge: what does "contiguous" really mean?
- Isolationist to Imperialist
 - Colonies, annexed territory outside contiguous US

