

Frank DuBose

20th Century Spanish History

Explosion of the Maine

Comparing Three New York Newspapers

The New York Journal, *The New York World*, and *The New York Times* all covered the explosion of the Maine in 1898, and each reported the event with drastically different styles and goals.

The *NYJ* was, without a doubt, the most sensational and least believable article. Both the content of the writing and the aesthetic elements like formatting sought to induce a strong negative reaction in its readers against Spain and Cuba. The headline of the article, “Destruction Of The War Ship Maine Was The Work Of An Enemy,” is accusatory and direct, immediately setting the tone for the information that followed. Apart from the article itself, the remaining space on the page was filled with reward offers for anyone who could bring forth evidence that led to the arrest of the criminals responsible. Everything about the front page attempts to coax the readers into automatically assuming that the explosion was not an accident.

In terms of the writing, there is little evidence presented to support the claim that the explosion was intentional. It is said that this is “the secret opinion of many Spaniards” and the opinion of several Naval authorities as well, without naming whom these people are or if they have any sort of status. It reports that Theodore Roosevelt is convinced the explosion was not an accident but gives no evidence for this statement.

The *NYJ* is quite obviously not trying to present facts to the public so that they may draw their own conclusions, but is instead seeking to put forth an opinion for their readers to adopt without questioning the circumstances.

In nearly direct opposition to the *Journal* is *The New York Times*. The *NYT* presents a beautifully neutral article on the explosion and varies significantly from the *Journal* article. Most notably, there is no image accompanying the *NYT* article, which prevents readers from having an emotional and irrational reaction from a strong visual image. The header is also wildly different – “Maine’s Hull Will Decide”. It is not nearly as large, and instead of putting forth the bold statement that the explosion was the work of the enemy it immediately and effortlessly tells readers that the cause of the explosion is still unknown.

The uncertainty of the situation is mentioned again directly below the header before the article even begins. Then, in the main body, two specific high-ranking individuals of the armed forces are quoted and reiterate the lack of legitimate information. The first says he is unable to make a definitive statement at least until the Captain of the ship completes his report of the incident. However, he addresses the details of the situation and makes his decision based on that information. The second individual echoes the rationality of the first and elaborates on the presence of coal bunkers in large ships. He knows that fires stemming from the coal reservoirs are common in such ships. He also recognizes the capabilities of the Spanish forces and the unlikelihood that they were

sufficiently capable of planning and executing such an attack. All in all, the *NYT* seeks to present the explosion and known information as accurately as possible. It presents the facts of the case and includes the insight of knowledgeable individuals.

Falling between the *NYT* and the *NYJ* in terms of writing quality is *The New York World*. Its article's format is similar to the *NYJ* – it features a large drawn image of a violent explosion and a bold header. However, the content is not nearly as one-sided. The header, while still suggestive of an attack, is posed in the form of a question rather than an accusation – “Maine Explosion Caused By Bomb Or Torpedo?” The second statement tells readers that at least two officials (whose names are given) are doubtful of a hostile attack, and the third that legitimate investigations are being conducted to find out more information. It still includes sensationalist material, such as mentioning a “suppressed dispatch to the State Department” that blamed the Spanish, but at the same time there is ample recognition that proper research and fact-finding that must first occur before a conclusion can be formed.

In summary, *The New York Journal* sought to pit the American people against the Spanish and gave little to no solid evidence for any of its claims in the article. *The New York World* was also sensationalist, but rightfully mentioned doubts among U.S. officers as to the likelihood of a Spanish attack. *The New York Times* presented the most well-rounded article. It makes no accusations and offers substantive evidence and reason for skepticism to the American people.