

29 The Spanish-American War

To that composite American identity of the future, Spanish character will supply some of the most needed parts. No stock shows a grander historical retrospect—grander in religiousness and loyalty, or for patriotism, courage, decorum, gravity and honor.

—WALT WHITMAN,
CAMDEN, NEW JERSEY,
JULY 20, 1893

In the late 1800s, naval officers and business people were arguing for a more powerful navy to protect U.S. foreign markets. The most influential of these was Captain (later Admiral) Alfred T. Mahan. His book, *The Influence of Sea Power*, helped convince Congress to increase the navy's budget. By 1900, the U.S. Navy was one of the most powerful naval forces in the world.



This cartoon of the “Spanish brute” after the *Maine* disaster was a typical example of the racist attitude of Americans who wanted war with Spain.

Spain's time as a great world power was behind her. Still, she remembered the glory days of Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand and clung tightly to colonies in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippine Islands.

In Cuba there were those, like the Americans in 1776, who wanted freedom to run their own country, especially as many of the Spanish officials seemed cruel and corrupt. So the Cubans rose up against the Spaniards. Naturally, most Americans sided

with the revolutionaries.

Now this freedom movement came at the very time two rival American newspapers were fighting each other for readers. The Cuban story made exciting reading. Every day the newspaper headlines would boldly tell of atrocities in Cuba. When there was no real story to tell, eager reporters would make one up. That's called *yellow journalism* (good papers don't do it).

Anyway, with all the scare stories, the American people began screaming for war with Spain. They wanted Spain to clear out of the American hemisphere. But Spain didn't want to leave Cuba.

Spanish, Cuban, and American diplomats began meeting; they were trying to solve their differences quietly. Maybe they would have done so, if the *Maine* hadn't sailed into the harbor at Havana, Cuba.

The *Maine* was a U.S. battleship, and it had been sent to pick up

\$50,000 REWARD.—WHO DESTROYED THE MAINE!—\$50,000 REWARD

The Journal will give \$50,000 for information, furnished to it exclusively, that will convict the person or persons who sank the Maine.

NEW YORK JOURNAL

AND ADVERTISER. FIRST EDITION.

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DESTRUCTION OF THE WAR SHIP MAINE WAS THE WORK OF AN ENEMY

\$50,000!

\$50,000 REWARD!
For the Detection of the
Perpetrator of
the Maine Outrage!

The New York Journal hereby offers a reward of \$50,000 CASH for information FURNISHED TO IT EXCLUSIVELY.

Assistant Secretary Roosevelt
Convinced the Explosion of
the War Ship Was Not
an Accident.

\$50,000!

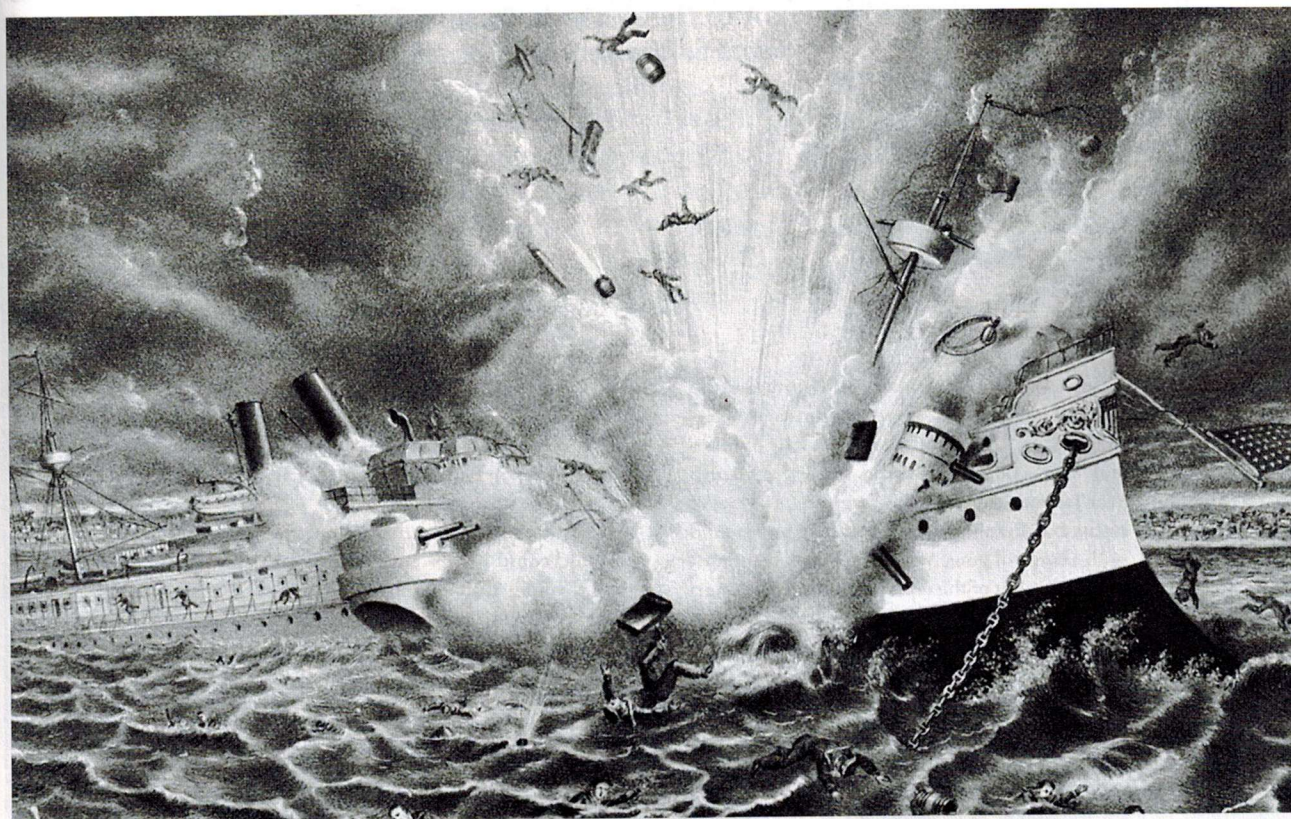
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American citizens if any trouble developed. Trouble did develop—on the *Maine*! The ship exploded! Sky high! Two hundred and sixty American sailors were killed.

A team of American experts said the *Maine* had hit a mine. Spanish officials said the explosion came from inside the ship. Seventy-eight years later, in 1976, an investigation proved the Spaniards were right.

The screaming headlines of the *New York Journal* sold more than a million copies a day when the *Maine* blew up. Joseph Pulitzer's *World* sent its own divers to investigate the wreck in Havana harbor.



A HISTORY OF US

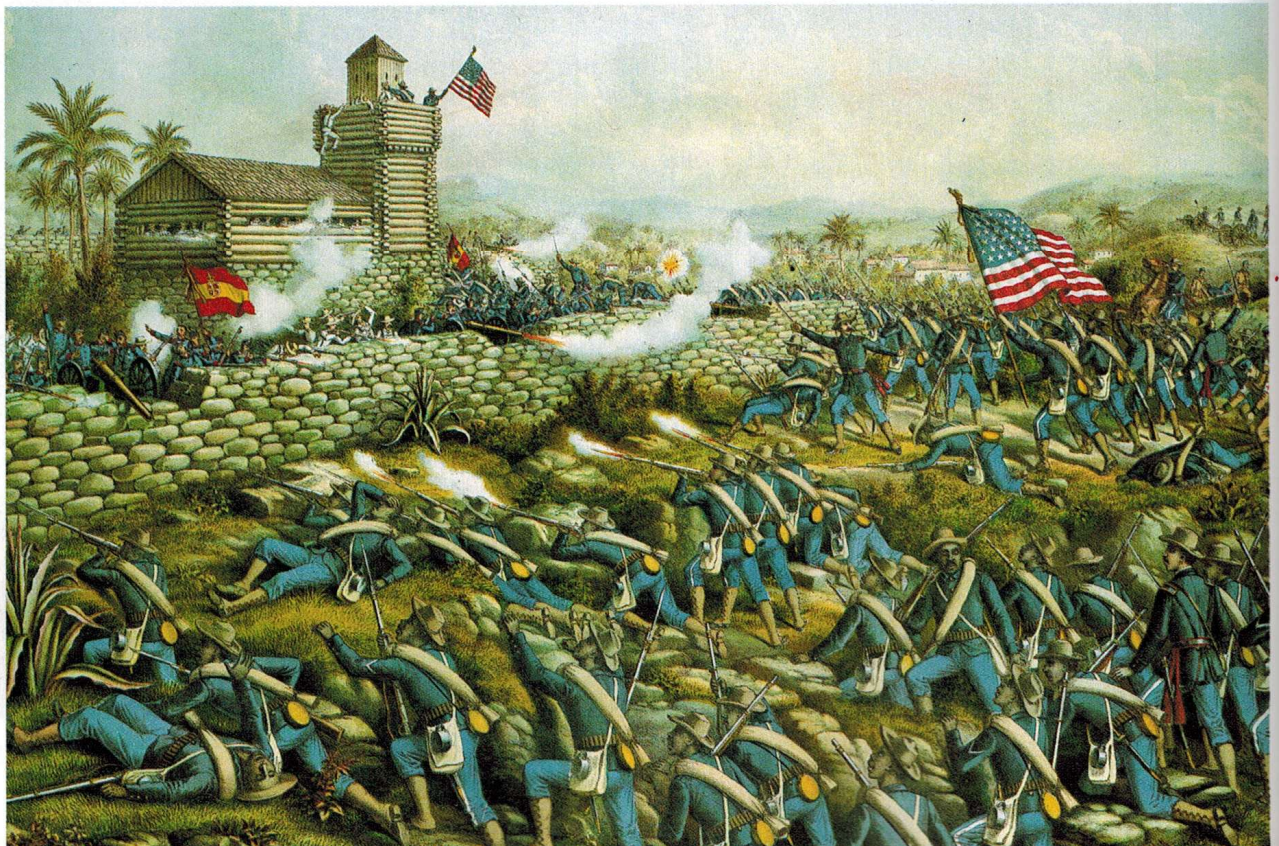


Teddy wrote about the Rough Riders: "Nine-tenths of the men were better horsemen than I was, and probably two-thirds of them better shots.... Yet...nobody else could command them as I could." Below: San Juan Hill.

Internal combustion had started a fire that reached some gunpowder on the *Maine*. In other words, it was an accident.

But in 1898 no one knew what had really happened. The newspapers played up the *Maine* story: they called it a Spanish attack. A headline in the popular *New York Journal* said WARSHIP MAINE SPLIT IN TWO BY AN ENEMY'S SECRET INFERNAL MACHINE. The American people went wild. They demanded war. Congress wanted war. Theodore Roosevelt wanted war. William McKinley was president, and he had fought in the Civil War. He knew the horrors of war; he wanted no part of one. People started calling him a coward. They didn't realize it usually takes more courage to say no than yes. Finally McKinley gave in. War was declared on Spain.

Theodore Roosevelt, who was now assistant secretary of the Navy, resigned at once. He wanted to get into this war. He organized a cavalry troop, which trained in Texas. The cavalrymen called themselves "Rough Riders." (They got that name from the old Pony Express.) But when they got to the docks in Tampa, Florida, they found there was room on the ship only for officers' horses. The Rough Riders



wanted to fight, even if they had to be foot soldiers. So they called themselves "Weary Walkers," and headed for Cuba.

In Cuba they fought fearlessly, TR most of all. He charged ahead with bullets flying around him. Along with the 9th and 10th black regiments, the Rough Riders fought their way up two important hills, Kettle Hill and San Juan Hill. The Spaniards were at the top of the hills, shooting down on them. When those Americans took San Juan Hill they went into the history books forever.

The war was short and popular. (It was over in 113 days.) Northerners and Southerners fought together; that helped heal some of the old Civil War wounds. Cuba won her freedom; Spain lost out. The United States took Puerto Rico as an American territory.

In the Pacific, Admiral George Dewey sailed into Manila harbor in the Spanish-held Philippine Islands and destroyed a Spanish fleet. The Philippines became American territory; so did Guam and Wake Island. At about the same time, American businessmen in the Hawaiian Islands asked the United States to annex those islands. We did.

Some native Hawaiians, and many Filipinos, wanted to be independent—they wanted to form their own nations. They weren't given a choice. American expansionists wanted the islands. The Filipinos decided to fight. They fought the United States valiantly. It took 75,000 soldiers—four times the number that fought in Cuba—to conquer the Filipinos.

Senator Henry Cabot Lodge said:

We must on no account let the islands go: the American flag is up and it must stay....Manila with its magnificent bay is the prize and pearl of the East....it will keep us open to the markets of China.

A Harvard professor called the Philippine fight an "unrighteous war." Samuel Gompers called it "an unjust war." But few Americans agreed.

Theodore Roosevelt came home from Cuba a hero. New Yorkers soon elected him governor. As governor, he worked so hard and did such a good

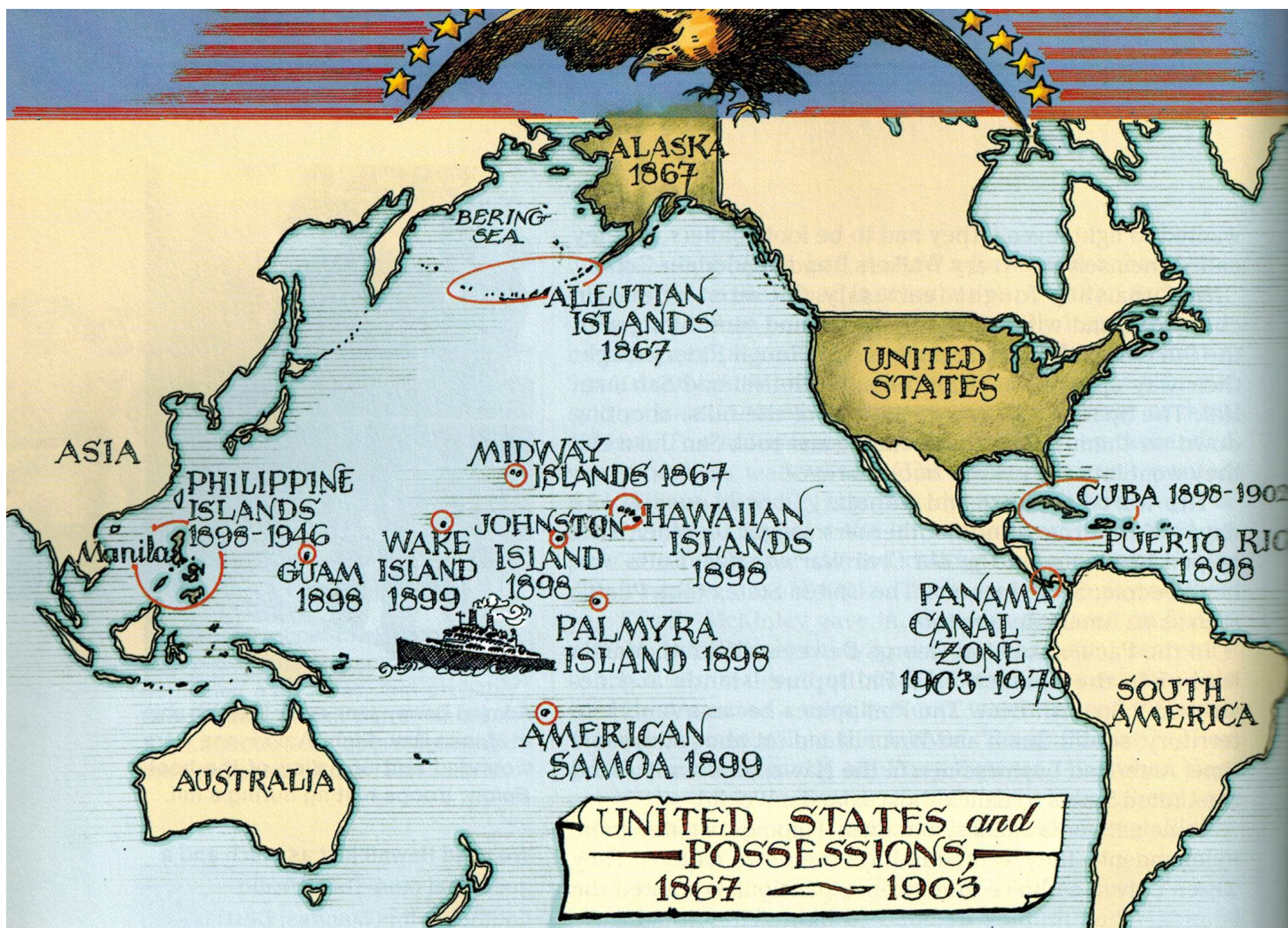


Admiral Dewey sank every Spanish ship in Manila Bay. Eight Americans were wounded and one died of the heat. Below: troops resting during a lull.

We need Hawaii just as much and a good deal more than we did California. It is Manifest Destiny.

—WILLIAM A. MCKINLEY, 1898





You can see TR's diary on a web site called the National Digital Library (NDL) that is part of the Library of Congress's site. You will also find Abraham Lincoln's drafts of the Gettysburg Address, early motion pictures, fliers seeking the return of runaway slaves, and more. Go to <http://www.loc.gov>

In the cartoon at right, the trusts tell McKinley what to do; nursemaid Mark Hanna sits on TR to shut him up.

job that the political bosses hated him. They didn't know what to do—TR was trying to put them out of business! Then one of them got a bright idea. Why not nominate TR as vice president of the United States? That way he would be out of New York and out of their hair. Roosevelt was ambitious; he was delighted to run for vice president on the Republican ticket with William McKinley (going for a second term). They were elected easily. No one knew an assassin had a bullet ready for President McKinley.

Theodore Roosevelt was hiking in the Adirondack Mountains when a messenger ran puffing up the mountain with a telegram. McKinley was dead. Roosevelt was 42, younger than any president before him. His first day in the White House was his father's birthday. That, he believed, was a good omen.



Mark Hanna didn't see anything good about it. He was a political insider who had been persuaded to help get TR out of New York and into the "safe" job of vice president. "Now look!" Hanna said to New York's Senator Platt. "That damned cowboy is president of the United States!"

To **annex** means to bring land into a larger territory.

War With Spain—Imperialism and Open Doors

Senator Albert J. Beveridge, from Indiana, thought the United States should expand wherever it could. He saw the spoils of the Spanish War as a path to world power. Here is what he said in 1898:

Those who do not want the United States to annex foreign lands tell us that we ought not to govern a people without their consent. I answer, "That rule of government applies only to those people who are capable of self-government." We govern the Indians without their consent. We govern our territories without their consent. We govern our children without their consent . . .

Carl Schurz, a former senator, was an anti-imperialist. He didn't think the United States should annex foreign territories. This is what he said in 1899:

Our government was, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, "the government of the people." To make this republic the example and guiding star of mankind was the noblest of ambitions. Such was our ambition just a short year ago.

Then came the Spanish War. When our forces occupied foreign territory, a loud demand arose that the conquests, even the Philippines, should be kept. "Why not?" was the cry. Has not the job of the republic almost from its beginning been one of territorial expansion? The question is not whether we can do such things, but whether we should do them.

Imperialism: The policy of expanding a nation by claiming foreign lands.

Open Door: A policy where all nations have equal opportunities to trade in a region.

The 19th century was an imperialist era. Most Americans wanted to join the imperialist competition. But when it came to China we had something else to say. Great Britain and Japan had gotten there first. We complained and demanded that China be open to all who wanted to trade with her. We wanted an "open door" to China's rich markets. We also wanted an open door in Latin America.

"In times of peace prepare for war," writes schoolboy Uncle Sam, in this cover cartoon from Judge Magazine.

