

THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR: THE UNITED STATES BECOMES A WORLD POWER

The Spanish-American War lasted only about ten weeks in 1898. However, the war had far-reaching effects for both the United States and Spain.



"Rough Rider Roosevelt"
<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3g02471>

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Causes of the War

The conflict had complex beginnings. By the 1890s, Cuba had unsuccessfully battled Spain for independence for many years. In 1895, the Cuban revolutionary José Martí led an expedition to the island, attempting to seize power from Spain.

As a result of U.S. economic interests in Cuba, the U.S. government sought to stabilize the situation. An agreement was negotiated between the United States and Spain by which Cuba would become self-governing on January 1, 1898.

Events derailed this plan. Following a January riot in Havana, President William McKinley sent the USS Maine to Havana to protect U.S. citizens and interests. On February 15, an explosion sank the Maine, killing 266 men on board.

On April 19, Congress passed the Teller Amend-

ment, which said that the United States would not establish permanent control over Cuba. The United States declared war on Spain on April 25.

The War

Although Cuba played a key role in the start of the war, battles between the U.S. and Spain took place around the world. In fact, the first hostilities took place in the Philippines on May 1, in the Battle of Manila Bay. Fighting did not occur in Cuba until June; a key battle took place on July 1. One of the leaders of U.S. forces in this battle was Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, who led a cavalry regiment known as the Rough Riders.

In May, U.S. troops landed in Puerto Rico, where they faced little Spanish opposition. By August 2, the Spanish and the Americans began to negotiate an end to the conflict, with the Spanish accepting the peace terms laid out by President McKinley.

Hostilities formally ended on August 12, 1898.

The Treaty of Paris, ending the Spanish-American War, was signed on December 10. Spain gave up Guam, Puerto Rico, its possessions in the West Indies, and the Philippines in exchange for a U.S. payment of \$20 million. The United States occupied Cuba but, as provided for in the Teller Amendment, did not try to annex it.

Media Coverage

The war helped fuel major changes in U.S. news media. U.S. newspapers covered the war with gusto. Technological innovations changed reportage and documentation. New technology that made it easier for newspapers to publish photographs allowed the papers to publish more illustrations and less text. Some reporters in the field in Cuba provided excellent, firsthand reporting. Reporters who used telegraphs as the basis for their stories, however, typically relied on secondhand information.

Major newspaper owners—including Joseph Pulitzer of the New York World and William Randolph Hearst of the New York Journal—viewed public interest in the war as an opportunity to sell newspapers. The papers, in a circulation war, featured sensational coverage and attention-grabbing photographs of events in Cuba. Although the cause of the explosion of the USS Maine was unknown, for example, New York newspapers blamed Spain. Historians once held that biased coverage of the war, often referred to as yellow journalism, was a cause of the war. Today, however, historians find less evidence for that claim.

At the time of the war's outbreak, film was a new medium, and the conflict became a popular topic. Short films showed such scenes as servicemen exercising, Theodore Roosevelt and the Rough Riders on their horses, and funeral processions of dead soldiers. Motion pictures began to move from being

seen as a fad to an accepted method of documenting historical events—even though some films depicting events from the war were actually re-enactments.

Aftermath

Victory in the Spanish-American War transformed the United States, a former colony, to an imperial power. Many Americans saw this development as a natural part of the nation's "Manifest Destiny"—the belief that expansion of the United States was both right and inevitable.

Opposition to this new role also existed. In June 1898, the American Anti-Imperialist League was formed to fight annexation of the Philippines. Its members included former President Grover Cleveland, industrialist Andrew Carnegie, author Mark Twain, and labor leader Samuel Gompers.

A recognized war hero, Theodore Roosevelt instantly became credible as a political candidate. Roosevelt was elected governor of New York in 1898 and vice president of the United States in 1901. He became the youngest president to date later that year, when President McKinley was assassinated just months into his second term.

1. Who did Cuba want independence from?
2. Why did the US declare war on Cuba?
3. How did the Treaty of Paris end the war: What were the provisions?
4. How did the media coverage impact the war?
- 2 5. What is the role of media today in war?