

Foreign affairs crept into the spotlight during McKinley's term, particularly American dealings with Hawaii and Cuba. Harrison and Cleveland had left the Hawaiian problem unsettled. Located two thousand miles west of California, the Hawaiian Islands (also called the Sandwich Islands) had played host to American sailors, traders, and missionaries in the 1800s. Rich in sugar, fruit, and other products, the United States had extended tariff favors to Hawaii, and American business interests soon controlled important sugar plantations, often dominating the islands' economies. In 1893, with tacit U.S. support, republican forces on the islands staged a rebellion against Queen Liliuokalani, who had gained the throne two years earlier when David Kalakaua, her brother, died. Liliuokalani inherited charges of corruption, including special favors to sugar magnate Claus Spreckels. Her brother had also repealed laws prohibiting sales of liquor and opium to Hawaiians. An antimonarchy movement, spearheaded by the Reform Party, forced Kalakaua to sign the "Bayonet constitution" in 1887—so named because it was signed under threat of an armed uprising. The constitution gave foreigners the right to vote. When Liliuokalani ascended to the throne, ostensibly to maintain and protect the constitution, she immediately sought to overthrow it. Thus the rebellion of 1893, while certainly supported by whites, was a response to the queen's poor judgment as much as it was an American plot.

The new government sent a treaty of annexation to Washington, but the lame duck Harrison forwarded it to the Senate. When the antiexpansionist Cleveland came into office, he dispatched a team to Hawaii to determine if the revolution was genuine or an American-contrived plot. Based on its findings, Cleveland concluded that the latter was the case. He determined that although

Liliuokalani had indeed planned to elevate herself again above the constitution, a group of eighteen Hawaiians, including some sugar farmers, with the aid of U.S. Marines, had overthrown her and named themselves as a provisional government.

What is often missed is at least one earlier attempt by Hawaii to become a part of the United States: in 1851, King Kamehameha III had secretly asked the United States to annex Hawaii, but Secretary of State Daniel Webster declined, saying, "No power ought to take possession of the islands as a conquest . . . or colonization." Webster, preoccupied by slavery, was unwilling to set a precedent that might allow more slave territory into the Union.

By the time the issue reached McKinley's desk, another concern complicated the Hawaiian question: Japan. The Empire of Japan had started to assert itself in the Pacific and, seeing Hawaii as a threat to her sphere of interest, sent warships to Hawaii and encouraged emigration there. This greatly troubled Theodore Roosevelt, among others, who energetically warned Americans that they could not allow Japan to claim the islands. McKinley, in private, agreed with Roosevelt, though he was coy when it came to stating so publicly. Before he assumed office, McKinley had told representatives from Hawaii, "Of course I have my ideas about Hawaii, but consider that it best at the present time not to make known what my policy is."²⁵ Nevertheless, once in office he pointed out that if nothing was done, "there will be before long another Revolution, and Japan will get control."²⁶ "We cannot let those islands go to Japan," McKinley bluntly told Senator George Hoar.²⁷

Indeed, it was Hawaii herself that, in June 1897, refused to admit a new contingent of Japanese laborers, prompting a visit from Imperial warships. And it was not big business that supported Hawaiian annexation—quite the contrary, the western sugar beet interests opposed the infusion of Hawaiian cane sugar. At the same time, McKinley knew that an annexation treaty likely lacked the two-thirds Senate majority to pass, since most of the Southern Democrats disliked the notion of bringing in as citizens more Asians and brown-skinned Hawaiians. Therefore, to avoid dealing with the insufficient Senate majority, the Republicans introduced a joint resolution to annex Hawaii, apart from the original (withdrawn) treaty. On July 7, 1898, McKinley signed the joint resolution of Congress annexing the Hawaiian islands.

Cuba Libre!

A far more difficult problem that McKinley had inherited was a growing tension with Spain over Cuba. A Spanish possession, Cuba lay only ninety miles off the coast of Florida. At one time it had been both gatekeeper and customhouse for Spain's New World empire, but, like Spain herself, Cuba had lost influence. The Cubans desired freedom and autonomy, as illustrated by one revolt that lasted from 1868-1878 and another that erupted in 1895, all suppressed by the 160,000 Spanish soldiers on the island. General Valeriano Weyler, who governed the island, had a reputation for unusual cruelty, leading to his nickname the Butcher. For forty years

the United States had entertained notions of purchasing Cuba, but Spain had no intention of selling, and the installation of Weyler sounded a requiem for negotiations to acquire the Pearl of the Antilles.

American concerns were threefold. First, there was the political component, in which Americans sympathized with the Cubans' yearning for independence. Second, businessmen had important interests on the island, cultivated over several decades. Sugar, railroads, shipping, and other enterprises gave the United States an undeniable economic interest in Cuba, while at the same time putting Americans in a potential crossfire. Third, there was the moral issue of Weyler's treatment of the Cubans, which appealed to American humanitarianism.

It might have ended at that—with Americans expressing their support for the rebels from afar—if not for the efforts of two newspapermen, Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst. Pulitzer, an Austro-Hungarian immigrant, had worked as a mule driver before being recruited by Carl Schurz to write for a German-language daily. A Radical Missouri Republican, Pulitzer had purchased the St. Louis *Post* and *Dispatch* newspapers, using them as a base for the reformist agenda that included issues of prohibition, tax fraud, and gambling. His most important acquisition, however, the *New York World*, emphasized sensation, scandal, and human interest stories. For all of its innovation and success, the *New York World* remains best known for a color supplement it started to run in 1896 on cheap yellow paper featuring a cartoon character known as *The Yellow Kid*, which led to the phrase, "yellow press."²⁸

Hearst, born to California millionaire rancher George Hearst, obtained the San Francisco *Examiner* to satisfy a gambling debt. He admired Pulitzer and tailored the *Examiner* to resemble Pulitzer's paper. Emphasizing investigative reporting combined with reformism and sensationalism, Hearst employed the best writers he could find, including Ambrose Bierce, Stephen Crane, Mark Twain, and Jack London. Purchasing the *New York Journal* in 1895, Hearst became Pulitzer's competitor. The two men had much in common, though. Both saw the chaos and tragedy of Cuba purely in terms of expanded circulation. Cuban suffering advanced sales, but a war would be even better. Hearst assigned the brilliant artist Frederic Remington to Cuba to provide battle sketches, well before any hostilities were announced. When Remington arrived in Cuba, he cabled back to Hearst that there was no war to illustrate. "You furnish the pictures," Hearst wired. "I'll furnish the war."²⁹

Each publisher sought to outdo the other with Spanish horror stories, giving Weyler his nickname and referring to Cuba as a prison. (Ironically, eighty years later, when Castro's Cuba genuinely became such a prison no national newspaper dared call it as much.)

Nevertheless, the influence of the press in fomenting war has been overemphasized. Cuban expatriates had already circulated in major U.S. cities attempting to raise awareness and money. Moreover, mainstream papers, such as the *New York Times*, supported McKinley's caution. The role of business in beating

the drums for war has also been exaggerated, since as many businesses opposed any support for the revolution as supported it. Prosperity had only recently returned to the nation, and industrialists wished to avoid any disruption of markets that war might bring. Certainly an intellectual case for war, embraced by Alfred Thayer Mahan, John Hay, and Roosevelt, needed no support from the yellow press. Their arguments combined the need for humanitarian relief for the suffering Cubans with the necessity for naval bases and eviction of Old World powers from the Caribbean, as well as good old-fashioned expansionism.

If the yellow press needed any help in "furnishing" the war, Spanish minister to Washington Dupuy de Lome provided it with a letter he wrote in February 1897. De Lome's letter ended up on a desk at the *New York Journal*, thanks to the Cuban rebels and their contacts in New York, and of course the paper gleefully printed its contents with the headline WORST INSULT TO THE UNITED STATES IN ITS HISTORY. The minister called McKinley "weak and a bidder for the admiration of the crowd" who played both sides of the war issue.³⁰ He further announced his intention to propagandize among American senators and "others in opposition to the junta."³¹ McKinley demanded a formal apology, and even though Spain generally agreed with American conditions, the Spanish delay in issuing the apology made them look belligerent. Nevertheless, it appeared relations might be restored, and as part of the reconciliation, McKinley dispatched the battleship USS *Maine* to make a courtesy call to Havana.

At anchor in Havana, the *Maine's* presence seemed uncontroversial. Sailors routinely walked the streets, fraternizing with sailors of the Spanish navy and purchasing Cuban goods to take home. On the evening of February 15, 1898, however, a massive explosion rocked the vessel, which slowly sank, killing 260 crewmen. News reached McKinley at three o'clock in the morning. Coming on the heels of the de Lome letter—which had actually been written many months earlier—McKinley assumed that the two were linked, but he hoped to avoid a rush to war. He ordered an investigation of the explosion, knowing that a conclusion showing the blast had originated from the outside would tend to implicate Spain (although certainly the rebels had a stake in trying to involve the United States). Americans, however, already seemed convinced of Spain's complicity, and increasingly McKinley was viewed as blocking a necessary war.

Although no proof was offered of Spain's culpability (and not until 1910 did an official inquiry on the remains of the ship seem to confirm that the explosion was caused by a mine), on April 20, 1898, Congress handed McKinley a war resolution, along with the Teller Amendment to liberate Cuba within five years of occupation. For those historians who claimed the United States desired an empire, American behavior was odd: what other empires legally bind themselves to abandoning conquered lands the instant they acquire them? Spain's sudden conciliatory attitude notwithstanding, the pieces fit too conveniently for many Americans to arrive at any other conclusion than that the Spanish were responsible for the sinking of the *Maine*. From Spain it was much too little, too late, and for the

United States it was another opportunity to teach the pompous European state a lesson. On April twenty-first, the Spanish severed diplomatic ties. Four days later, Congress declared war.

Just as the world powers had fully expected Mexico to easily defeat the United States in the Mexican War, Europeans again overestimated the decrepit Spanish empire's strengths and virtually ignored American technology and resolve. The U.S. Army was small and largely untrained. Many units were volunteers; those who had fighting experience came from the frontier, where the Sioux and the Apache presented much different challenges than the more conventional Spanish foe.

McKinley made plans to gather the forces at Tampa and other Florida ports, then land at several points in Cuba. He called for 200,000 volunteers to expand the small 28,000-man army, and by the end of November 1898, 223,000 volunteers had swelled the ranks. These volunteers included the famous Theodore Roosevelt (who had resigned his position as assistant secretary of the navy) and his Rough Riders, an assortment of Indians and scouts, miners and marauders, and even the famous Prescott, Arizona, lawman Bucky O'Neill. But the regiment also included James Robb Church, a star football player at Princeton; New York socialite Hamilton Fish; and the cream of Harvard and Yale. Everyone wanted to join, including the creator of the famous *Tarzan* series, Edgar Rice Burroughs, whom Roosevelt rejected.³²

Equipping and transporting this army of volunteers was a difficult matter. A new Krag .308 rifle that fired smokeless shells was available, but few units had it; troops called the poor food they received "embalmed beef"; and the atrocious state of medical facilities contributed to the deaths of 2,565 men from disease—more than seven times the 345 men who died in combat.³³ The Rough Riders found they could not even take their horses to Cuba. For good or ill, though, one thing was certain: the press would cover this war. Hearst had seen to that. In addition to Remington with his sketchbooks, author Stephen Crane, whose Civil War tale, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), had already become a classic, traveled with the troops to Cuba.

America may have trailed Spain in rifle quality and even the training of her ground forces, but the United States had a decided advantage at sea. There the white cruisers *Olympia*, *Boston*, *Raleigh*, *Concord*, and *Baltimore* outranged and outgunned all of the Spanish vessels. Deploying the fleet to Hong Kong, however, was entirely Roosevelt's doing; he had given the order when the secretary of the navy had gone out of the office for a doctor's appointment. European observers, as always, underestimated Yankee capabilities. Commodore George Dewey, who headed the U.S. Asiatic squadron, reported strong betting at the Hong Kong Club against the Americans, even at considerable odds.

The American battle plan was sound, however. First, Roosevelt ordered Dewey's squadron to Hong Kong even before a declaration of war, in case hostilities broke out. In April, Dewey headed to sea, where he prepared for battle. Spain had seven vessels to Dewey's six in Manila Bay, but they were inferior, and their

commander, Rear Admiral Patricio Passaron, knew it. Lined up in Manila Bay, Passaron, in a state of gloom, resigned himself to going down with guns blazing. After the declaration of war, Dewey had sailed for Manila Bay. Spanish guns fired first, prompting shouts of "Remember the Maine" from the American decks, but Dewey uttered his classic line, repeated afterward in countless cartoons, when he told the *Olympia's* captain, "You may fire when ready, Gridley." At a range of more than five thousand yards—outside the Spaniards' range—U.S. guns shattered the helpless Spanish ships.³⁴ Dewey did not lose a single man.³⁵

A two-pronged assault on Cuba was the second piece of the U.S. strategy, and it was aimed at forcing the Spanish Caribbean fleet to exit its port while American troops advanced overland to Havana. The grand assault was led by the three-hundred-pound General William Shafter, whose forces landed on June twenty-second at Daquiri, unopposed and unscathed. The only U.S. casualties were five drowned horses.

Ex-Rebel General Joseph Wheeler, in his first encounter with Spanish troops, shouted, "We've got the damned Yankees on the run!"³⁶ But his men knew what he meant, and they proceeded to link up with Shafter's forces. By that time, Shafter had fallen ill, to the point where he was unable to ride. After driving the Spaniards out of several positions, American troops converged on the main target, San Juan Heights.

Faced with two hills, San Juan and Kettle, Leonard Wood's regiments—including the Rough Riders (whose horses were still back in Tampa) and Lieutenant John J. Pershing's 10th Cavalry buffalo soldiers—crossed the river in front of Kettle Hill. Organizing both the regiments, Teddy Roosevelt, a mounted sitting target, spurred his horse Little Texas in front of his men charging on foot. The units storming Kettle Hill raised a cheer from the American forces still pinned under fire below San Juan Heights.

Spanish positions on San Juan Heights still proved impenetrable until a courageous captain, G. S. Grimes, drove three batteries of Gatling guns to within six hundred yards of the Spanish lines and poured fire at them. (Remington captured the moment in a memorable painting). That was enough to spark the actual "charge up San Juan Hill." Roosevelt had already led his men up *Kettle Hill* and was not among those advancing on San Juan's positions, and the "charge" was an orderly, steady advance into heavy fire.

At the same time, Roosevelt's Rough Riders, pouring machine gun fire into the Spanish flank, charged down the mild slope of Kettle Hill directly into the Spanish positions. Spanish resistance disintegrated. Later, Pershing wrote his recollections of the attack: "White regiments, black regiments, regulars and Rough Riders, representing the young manhood of the North and the South, fought shoulder to shoulder, unmindful of race or color, unmindful of whether commanded by ex-Confederate or not, and mindful of only their common duty as Americans."³⁷ The Spanish general Joaquin Vara del Rey had the gross misfortune of being shot through both legs; then, as his men carried him on a stretcher to safety, he was hit again, through the head. Roosevelt, recommended for a

Medal of Honor for his actions by both commanding officers, Shafter and Wood, was denied the recognition by political enemies until January 2001, when Congress finally awarded it to him posthumously.

Shafter, still battling gout and heat, now surrounded Santiago and squeezed Admiral Pascual Cervera's fleet out of the harbor, where it had to run the gauntlet of Admiral William Sampson's American vessels. On July 3, 1898, Cervera's fleet sailed out, much to the surprise of Sampson. The Spanish knew what awaited them. "Poor Spain," said a captain aboard the *Theresa* to Admiral Cervera. The sound of the ship bugles meant that Spain had become "a nation of the fourth class."³⁸ After a brief running battle with the far superior American ships, in which the U.S. Navy badly damaged all of Cervera's vessels, the Spanish fleet hauled down its colors. "The fleet under my command," telegraphed Admiral Sampson to Washington, "offers the nation, as a Fourth of July present, the whole of Cervera's fleet."³⁹ Spain quickly capitulated. Despite the loss of only 400 men in combat, the Spanish-American War had proven costly. The government had mobilized thousands of soldiers who never saw action, but who ultimately would draw pensions valued at \$5 billion. At the end of sixty years, the pensions from the Spanish-American War still cost the United States \$160 million annually.

Final negotiations left the United States in control of the Philippines, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. The Senate had insisted that Cuba be free and not a U.S. possession, but the United States paid \$20 million for Guam, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico. The disposition of these other territories, however, was not so clear. Two other nations, in addition to the Filipinos themselves, had an interest in the Philippines. Filipino freedom fighters, led by Emilio Aguinaldo, had been brought by Dewey from Hong Kong to help liberate the Philippines. Aguinaldo's ten thousand insurgents had helped to capture Manila. Under other circumstances, it is highly likely the United States would have washed its hands of the Philippines and hastily departed.

By 1898, however, there were other considerations. Roosevelt, Alfred Thayer Mahan, and others had already started to push the United States onto the world stage, and as a world power the nation needed overseas coaling stations. With the annexation of Hawaii in July, the Philippines suddenly became a logical extension of American naval bases.

Combined with the presence of British and German fleets, the fate of the Philippines as an American protectorate was sealed. Britain and Germany both had fleets in the region. Germany, in particular, thought little of the United States, saying, "God favored drunkards, fools, and the United States of America." Either nation could have controlled the Philippines the moment the American fleet left, although whether they would have fought each other is conjecture. At any rate, McKinley explained his reasoning as follows:

. . . one night it came to me this way . . . (1) we could not give them [the Philippines] back to Spain—that would be cowardly and dishonorable; (2) that we could not turn them over to France or Germany—our com-

mercial rivals in the Orient—that would be bad business and discreditable; (3) that we could not leave them to themselves—they were unfit for self-government—and they would soon have anarchy and misrule over there worse than Spain's was; and (4) that there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them.⁴⁰

The last point, although it played a minor part in the president's decision, had been on the minds of Protestant Americans, whose missionary societies had sent many evangelists to the islands. Methodists, in particular, wrote of saving the "little brown brother."⁴¹ Some historians dismiss these expressions of concern for the Filipinos as insincere excuses for national economic expansion, but, as usual, they ignore the genuine doctrinal commitment of most Christian groups to evangelize.

McKinley realized that the choice he faced was not whether to liberate the islands, but which of three nations—the United States, Germany, or Britain—would control them. Predictably, when the Stars and Stripes went up in Manila, sending the European fleets packing, it ensured a response from the eighty thousand Filipinos under Aguinaldo, who felt betrayed. An insurrection ensued, and for a year and a half, a guerrilla war of brutal proportions witnessed both sides engaging in torture and atrocities. McKinley, aware that the occupation required the support of the Filipino people, persuaded William Howard Taft to lead a five-man commission to Manila in April 1900. Taft, who liked the Filipinos, earned their respect and soon produced reasonable, concrete steps to reduce opposition.

McKinley's policy opened the door to anti-imperialists, such as William Jennings Bryan, the Populists, and the Anti-Imperialist League. League members handed out leaflets to soldiers in the Philippines, urging them not to reenlist. Some of the more extreme members of the League compared McKinley to a mass murderer and issued wild predictions that eight thousand Americans would die trying to hold the islands. The insurgents quoted Bryan and fellow anti-imperialist Edward Atkinson, thus inspiring the rebels and, possibly, prolonging the conflict, thereby contributing to the deaths of U.S. soldiers.

Aguinaldo himself remained elusive, despite unceasing American attempts to locate and capture him. Finally, with the assistance of an anti-insurrectionist Filipino group called the Maccabees, Aguinaldo was captured, and in April 1901 he swore an oath of allegiance to the United States. Three months later the military government ended, replaced by a provincial government under Taft.

The islands remained U.S. possessions until World War II, although in 1916, the Jones Act announced American intentions to grant Philippine independence as soon as practicable. In 1934, the Tydings-McDuffie Act provided a tutelage period of ten more years, setting the date for independence as 1944, and providing an election in which Manuel Quezon became the first president of the Philippines. Although Japanese occupation of the islands delayed independence beyond the 1944 target, in 1946 the United States granted independence to the

Philippines on the Fourth of July, once again proving wrong the critics of America who saw imperial interests as the reason for overseas expansion. Never before in history had a nation so willingly and, in general, so peacefully rescinded control over so much territory and so many conquered people as in the case of the possessions taken in the Spanish-American War.