

To Conquer or Redeem? The Spanish-Cuban-American War

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Filipino Soldiers, Library of Congress

Overview

The war which has commonly been known in America as the Spanish-American War really involved America, Cuba, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Spain, and a number of islands in the Pacific Ocean. The war lasted from 1898 to 1902.

This war has been considered a turning point in how America related to other nations. Events of the war divided opinions sharply on what America's international responsibilities should be. Should America follow the example of European nations such as Spain and England which had claimed vast empires in other parts of the world, or did America's own republican heritage dictate an anti-imperialist stance?

You are going to look at the history of this war from the perspective of an American citizen who lived through it and make up your own mind about American imperialism. You will follow daily events and respond to them as they happen. You will be paying attention not only to what happened, but also to how different Americans thought differently about the war and the various peoples involved in it.

Save your written work because you will use it later to construct an essay.

Note: to orient yourself, you may want to use the web site below, which provides world maps. Enter your location, click on "Satellite," and use magnifying glasses to zoom in and out.

<http://plasma.nationalgeographic.com/mapmachine>

Objectives

1. Develop an understanding of the debate over American imperialism as related to the events of the Spanish-Cuban-American War.
2. Practice analysis of primary source documents.
3. Practice writing in a variety of genres: short answer, personal letter, and formal essay.
4. Develop a critical perspective on news media.

Resources

The following are two websites used in this activity:

1. <http://www.pbs.org/crucible>
2. <http://lcweb.loc.gov/rr/hispanic>

Activities

Activity One

Imagine that it is the morning of February 15, 1898. You wake up, have breakfast (a chunk of bread and a cup of coffee, or maybe you try one of these new “breakfast cereals” that the health-nuts are all talking about) and leave the house. All down the street you hear the newsboys shouting “Explosion in Havana! Read all about it!” You rush to buy a paper and this is the headline that greets your eyes:

http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/990215onthisday_big.html

At work everyone is talking about the disaster.

A coworker (who you have always thought was a little slow) asks you “What the heck was our boat doing in Havana anyway?”

You have been following the news and know all about it.

Just then your boss tells you all to quit talking and get down to work. So you write a note to your coworker to tell him/her what you know.

Using the information on the following websites, write out your answer in one paragraph.

- Explain why the Maine was in Havana and what has been happening in Cuba recently in regards to Spain.
- You can write in an informal tone as this is a note to someone you know well. But remember to be very clear because this friend is not all that smart and is definitely not well informed.

<http://www.pbs.org/crucible/tl3.html>

<http://www.historyofcuba.com/history/ada1.htm>

http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/990215onthisday_big.html

<http://lcweb.loc.gov/rr/hispanic/1898/intro.html>

Activity Two

During the next few months there is news about Cuba every day and it seems to you that reporting is becoming very dramatic. Even the cartoonists are writing about Cuba. In April the United States declares war on Spain. You start to hear about something called “yellow journalism,” and wonder what this means. Consult the following websites to learn about it.

<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1866-1898/yellow-journalism>

<http://www.pbs.org/crucible/headlines.html>

For some examples of political cartoons from this era, go to the website below. For cartoons, click on “Cartoon gallery” on the left side of the page.

<http://www.pbs.org/crucible/cartoons.html>

Also look at the cartoons below.

Working in a pair with another student, come to an agreement about what “yellow journalism” means. Now choose two contemporary headlines from any local newspaper and make them “yellow.” Post them on your class's blackboard site (both the pre and post-translation versions).

OR, if you find a headline that you think is already “yellow,” translate it into less yellow phrasing and post it. Read the headlines your classmates have posted and respond.

CARTOON 6



Cartoon 6. UNCLE SAM TO PORTO RICO: "And to think that bad boy came near being your brother!" (Chicago Inter Ocean, 1905.)

Activity Three

The war ends in December, but just one month later you read that the U.S. is involved in another war, this time in the Philippines. At the same time that Cuba was revolting against Spain, the people of the Philippines were also trying to end Spanish control of their country.

In May, 1898, the U.S. Navy, led by Admiral Dewey, crushed the Spanish forces at Manila, in the Philippines. It seemed at the time that the U.S. was assisting the Filipino revolution. (Note: The people of the Philippines are referred to as Filipino). At the end of the war in Cuba, however, Spain sold the Philippines to the U.S. for \$20 million.

Now the people of the Philippines are resisting U.S. occupation. They consider themselves a free nation and claim the American Revolution as an inspiration for their overthrow of European imperial power.

Look at the web site below for a summary of the war:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/1900/peopleevents/pande33.html>

There are many in America who think it is the right thing for the U.S. to annex, or take over the Philippines. There are many others who disagree.

Read statements by people on both sides of the issue. Write down for yourself a brief summary of each argument.

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1898beveridge.html>

<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5478/>

Excerpt from “To the Person Sitting in Darkness ,” Mark Twain

(Originally published in North American Review, February 1901.)

Shall we? That is, shall we go on conferring our Civilization upon the peoples that sit in darkness, or shall we give those poor things a rest? Shall we bang right ahead in our old-time, loud, pious way, and commit the new century to the game; or shall we sober up and sit down and think it over first? Would it not be prudent to get our Civilization-tools together, and see how much stock is left on hand in the way of Glass Beads and Theology, and Maxim Guns and Hymn Books, and Trade-Gin and Torches of Progress and Enlightenment (patent adjustable ones, good to fire villages with, upon occasion), and balance the books, and arrive at the profit and loss, so that we may intelligently decide whether to continue the business or sell out the property and start a new Civilization Scheme on the proceeds?

Extending the Blessings of Civilization to our Brother who Sits in Darkness has been a good trade and has paid well, on the whole; and there is money in it yet, if carefully worked -- but not enough, in my judgement, to make any considerable risk advisable. The People that Sit in Darkness are getting to be too scarce -- too scarce and too shy. And such darkness as is now left is really of but an indifferent quality, and not dark enough for the game. The most of those People that Sit in Darkness have been furnished with more light than was good for them or profitable for us. We have been injudicious.

The Blessings-of-Civilization Trust, wisely and cautiously administered, is a Daisy. There is more money in it, more territory, more sovereignty, and other kinds of emolument, than there is in any other game that is played. But Christendom has been playing it badly of late years, and must certainly suffer by it, in my opinion. She has been so eager to get every stake that appeared on the green cloth, that the People who Sit in Darkness have noticed it -- they have noticed it, and have begun to show alarm. They have become suspicious of the Blessings of Civilization. More -- they have begun to examine them. This is not well. The Blessings of Civilization are all right, and a good commercial property; there could not be a better, in a dim light. In the right kind of a light, and at a proper distance, with the goods a little out of focus, they furnish this desirable exhibit to the Gentlemen who Sit in Darkness:

LOVE,
JUSTICE,
GENTLENESS,
CHRISTIANITY,
PROTECTION TO THE WEAK,
TEMPERANCE,
-- and so on. LAW AND ORDER, LIBERTY,
EQUALITY,
HONORABLE DEALING,
MERCY,
EDUCATION,

There. Is it good? Sir, it is pie. It will bring into camp any idiot that sits in darkness anywhere. But not if we adulterate it. It is proper to be emphatic upon that point. This brand is strictly for Export -- apparently. Apparently. Privately and confidentially, it is nothing of the kind. Privately and confidentially, it is merely an outside cover, gay and pretty and attractive, displaying the special patterns of our Civilization which we reserve for Home Consumption, while inside the bale is the Actual Thing that the Customer Sitting in Darkness buys with his blood and tears and land and liberty. That Actual Thing is, indeed, Civilization, but it is only for Export. Is there a difference between the two brands? In some of the details, yes.

Samuel Gompers (President of the American Federation of Labor)

Extract from a speech delivered at the Chicago Peace Jubilee, Oct. 18, 1898.

It is worse than folly, aye, it is a crime, to lull ourselves into the fancy that we shall escape the duties which we owe to our people by becoming a nation of conquerors, disregarding the lessons of nearly a century and a quarter of our national existence as an independent, progressive, humane and peace-loving nation. We cannot with safety to ourselves, or justice to others keep the workers and the lovers of reform and simple justice divided, or divert their attention, and thus render them powerless to expose abuses and remedy existing injustice.

A "foreign war as a cure for domestic discontent" has been the device of tyrants and false counselors from time immemorial, but it has always lead to a Waterloo, a Sedan, to certain decadence and often utter ruin. In our country we are perhaps too powerful to incur outside disaster; but we shall certainly court worse evils at home if we try to benumb the nation's sense of justice and love of right, and prevent it from striving earnestly to correct all proved errors.

If the Philippines are annexed what is to prevent the Chinese, the Negritos and the Malays coming to our country? How can we prevent the Chinese coolies from going to the Philippines and from there swarm into the United States and engulf our people and our civilization? If these new islands are to become ours, it will be either under the form of Territories or States. Can we hope to close the flood-gates of immigration from the hordes of Chinese and the semi-savage races coming from what will then be part of our own country? Certainly, if we are to retain the principles of law enunciated from the foundation of our Government, no legislation of such a character can be expected.

In a country such as ours the conditions and opportunities of the wage-earners are profoundly affected by the view of the worth or dignity of men who earn their bread by the work of their hands. The progress and improvement in the condition of the wage-earners in the former slave States have been seriously obstructed for decades in which manual labor and slave labor were identical. The South now, with difficulty, respects labor, because labor is the condition of those who were formerly slaves, and this fact operates potentially against any effort to secure social justice by legislative action or organized movement of the workers. If these facts have operated so effectually to prevent necessary changes in the condition of our own people, how difficult will it be to quicken our conscience so as to secure social and legislative relief for the semi-savage slave or contract laborers of the conquered islands?

If we attempt to force upon the natives of the Philippines our rule, and compel them to conform to our more or less rigid mold of government, how many lives shall we take? Of course, they will seem cheap, because they are poor laborers. They will be members of the majority in the Philippines, but they will be ruled and killed at the convenience of the very small minority there, backed up by our armed land and sea forces. The dominant class in the islands will ease its conscience because the victims will be poor, ignorant and weak. When innocent men can be shot down on the public highway as they were in Lattimer, Pa., and Virden, Ill., men of our own flesh and blood, men who help to make this homogenous nation great, because they dare ask for humane conditions at the hands of the moneyed class of our country, how much more difficult will it be to arouse any sympathy, and secure relief for the poor semi-savages in the Philippines, much less indignation at any crime against their inherent and natural rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? ..

SOURCE: Gompers, Samuel. "Imperialism -- Its Dangers and Wrongs." William Jennings Bryan, et al., Republic or Empire? The Philippine Question (Chicago: The Independence Co., 1899).

*<http://www.boondocksnet.com/ai/aitexts/gompers.html> In Jim Zwick, ed., *Anti-Imperialism in the United States, 1898-1935.* <http://www.boondocksnet.com/ai/>.*

You have several friends and relatives who are serving in the army. Read through the collection of letters and pictures on the two sites below. Imagine that men you know have sent these letters (and pictures) to you.

Letters from African-American soldiers:

<http://www.cousinsofcolor.com/letters/>

New York Times, 1901

Negro Deserter Beheaded

Native Filipino Scouts Caught David Fagin and Killed Him—Chaffee disapproves Torres's Sentence

Manila, December 8.—Native scouts from Bongabon, Province of Nueva Ecija, have killed the American negro David Fagin, a deserter from the Twenty-fourth (colored) Infantry, who for more than two years has been leading Filipinos against the American troops. The scouts decapitated their prisoner and the head was recognized as that of Fagin. They also secured his commission in the insurgent army.

Fagin had on one of his fingers the class ring of Lieut. Frederick W. Altstaetter of the Engineers, who was captured by Filipinos supposedly under the command of Fagin himself on Oct 28, 1900.

More than once Fagin has been reported killed. The authorities are satisfied that former statements of his death were erroneous and that this time he was really slain.

A military commission has sentenced the Filipino Gen. Isidoro Torres to be hanged after finding him guilty of ordering the assassination of Corp. Fieldner of the Twelfth Infantry at Malolos, Province of Bulacan, last October. The sentence of the commission has been disapproved by Gen. Chaffee, who finds that the commission had reasonable grounds to doubt whether Gen. Torres personally ordered the assassination of the American soldier. Gen. Chaffee thinks that the high rank held by Torres in the insurgent army would have been sufficient to prevent such an unmilitary action on his part.

For important background information on African-American soldiers in the Philippines, see

<http://www.nps.gov/prsf/learn/historyculture/the-philippine-insurrectiothe-philippine-war-a-conflict-of-consciencen-a-war-of-controversy.htm>

Read these letters from white American soldiers:

<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/58>

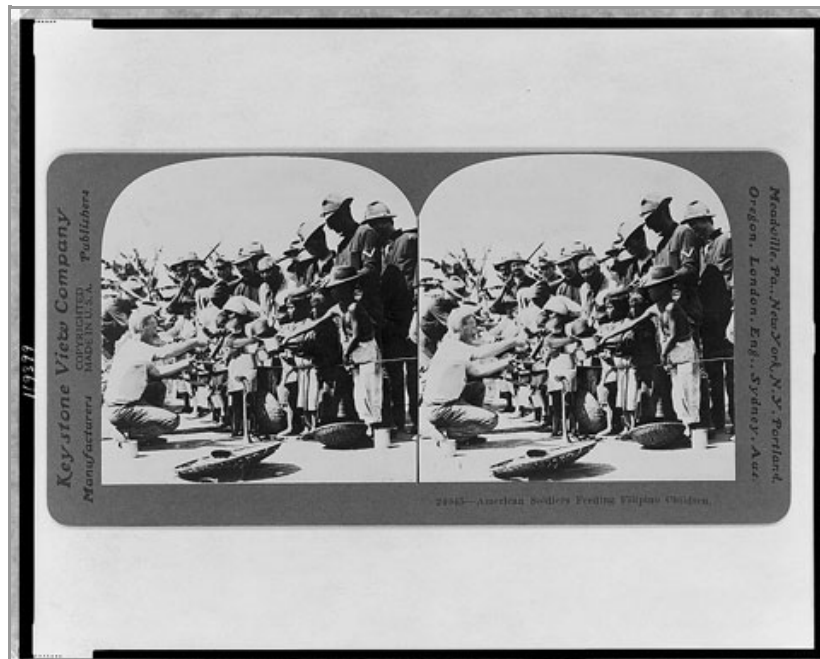
Stereograph Images from the Philippine-American War

Stereograph images were a popular form of entertainment in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Using specially designed devices, viewers could look at two images at once to create a three-dimensional effect. The captions given with the stereograph images here were included with the originals.

Look at these Photographs taken by Americans in the Philippines and published in America. Notice the captions that were included with the photographs.



A welcome to Uncle Sam's protection - three Filipinos entering American lines, Pasay, P.I.



American Soldiers Feeding Filipino Children



3598 A Negrito huntsman with his aboriginal war weapon, the long bow and arrows, Philippine Islands. Copyright 1907 by H. G. White Co.

A Negrito huntsman with his Aboriginal War Weapon, the Long Bow and Arrows, Philippine Islands



17548. Our young Filipinos in holiday attire at the Fourth of July celebration, Manila, P. I.

Our young Filipinos in Holiday Attire at the Fourth of July Celebration, Manila, P.I.



A Sacrifice to Aguinaldo's Ambition—Behind the Filipino Trenches after the battle of Malabon, P.I.



The Philippines, Porto Rico and Cuba—Uncle Sam's Burden (With apologies to Mr. Kipling)



Helping Mama Iron the Clothes—a Filipino Method, Island of Luzon, P.I.

To see more images of the Philippines, go to the Library of Congress page below and, after clicking on “search This collection,” type “Philippines.”

<http://memory.loc.gov/pp/stereohtml/stereoabt.html>

Watch the movie “Filipinos Retreat from Trenches.”

<http://www.loc.gov/item/98501198/>

Activity Four

During the course of the war, the United States Congress passes two amendments related to the war. The first is the Teller Amendment, passed in 1898:

The Teller Amendment, 1898 (See the following page)

The second is the Platt Amendment, passed in 1903:

<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/platt.htm>

You have been reading the newspapers and are interested to see that some people think that U.S. foreign policy has changed between the passage of the two amendments.

What is your opinion?

Write a four page essay which answers the following question;

- Given what you have read in activities 1-5, do you think that America developed a new policy towards other nations over the course of the war in Spain and the Philippines? If so, describe how this change occurred. If not, discuss how America's policy has remained consistent.

Before you begin writing, go over the paragraphs you have written and the notes you have taken on imperialist and anti-imperialist viewpoints.

To help compose your essay you may want to consider the following questions:

- Has American become an imperialist power?
- What are some of the arguments for and against American imperialism and how have they taken shape?
- In what ways would a person's race affect his or her perspective on the war?
- What role has the media played in the development of popular thinking?
- What is the correct role, in your opinion, of news media in war time?

Post your essay on the course's Blackboard site and respond to one classmate's essay, asking that person a question or further developing a point in that person's essay, either by arguing with it or by suggesting its implications.

The Teller Amendment, 1898

The Teller Amendment, 1898

Whereas the abhorrent conditions which have existed for more than three years in the Island of Cuba, so near our own borders, have shocked the moral sense of the people of the United States, have been a disgrace to Christian civilization, culminating, as they have, in the destruction of a United States battle ship, with two hundred and sixty-six of its officers and crew, while on a friendly visit in the harbor of Havana, and can not longer be endured, as has been set forth by the President of the United States in his message to Congress of April eleventh, eighteen hundred and ninety-eight, upon which the action of Congress was invited: Therefore,

Resolved, First. That the people of the Island of Cuba are, of right ought to be, free and independent.

Second. That it is the duty of the United States to demand, and the Government of the United States does hereby demand, that the Government of Spain at once relinquish its authority and government in the Island of Cuba and withdraw its land and naval forces from Cuba and Cuban waters.

Third. That the President of the United States be, and he hereby is, directed and empowered to use the entire land and naval forces of the United States, and to call into the actual service of the United States the militia of the several States, to such extent as may be necessary to carry these resolutions into effect.

Fourth. That the United States hereby disclaims any disposition or intention to exercise sovereignty, jurisdiction, or control over said Island except for the pacification thereof, and asserts its determination, when that is accomplished, to leave the government and control of the Island to its people.

Instructor's Annotations

The objectives for this module are to:

1. Help students develop an understanding of the debate over American imperialism as related to the events of the Spanish American War and to understand how ideas about race are connected to this debate
2. Give students several opportunities to analyze primary source material
3. Give students an opportunity to practice a range of writing genres in the interest of broadening their skills as writers and to use less formal assignments to prepare for a more formal one.
4. Give students an opportunity to think about news media critically

The module is designed to be taken apart; it can be used either in individual pieces or in its complete form.

Here are some suggestions for how to take it apart:

Activity Two can easily be separated from the rest of the module and used to supplement a more traditional coverage of the war.

Activity Three can potentially stand alone as a learning module for covering American involvement in the Philippines.

A variation on Activity Three that involves more group work:

1. Make groups of six. Assign each student two letters (with pictures, if using Boondocks.net). Tell the groups that they should imagine they are all meeting casually at a local saloon or street corner. Each should summarize the position of his or her soldiers, imagining that they are male relatives or friends.
2. After discussion within the groups, a representative from each group should tell the class about the range of perspectives represented by the soldiers within the group.
3. Now work in pairs, writing to a soldier. Follow the requirements listed above and post your letter on the course's Blackboard site. Read the other letters posted there and comment on what you see.

Activity Four could potentially be used on its own if background information from Activity One and Three (the first site mentioned) were consulted first. The essay question could be altered to read:

Given what you have read on the web sites provided, do you think that American foreign policy changed between 1898 and 1903? If so, how? And what events contributed to this shift? If not, explain consistency between the Teller and Platt amendments.

OR

Imperialist and anti-imperialist perspectives from Activity Four could be added to background materials for a more complex essay