

Activity**To war?**

War over the Venezuelan boundary dispute seemed a definite possibility in December 1895. Evaluate the case for and against war in both Great Britain and the United States. To what degree do you think that war was a real possibility throughout this crisis?

Discussion point

There is some evidence that the British did not initially take the Venezuelan boundary dispute as seriously as the United States did. Why might this have been the case? What other colonial issues were occupying British attention in the mid 1890s?

Activity**The Venezuelan Response**

In groups, brainstorm possible responses of the Venezuelan government to the British and US positions on the border dispute. Discuss possible outcomes for each response. Use the following chart to help.

Response	Possible US reaction	Possible British reaction

The Spanish–American War

The Spanish–American War started as a revolution by Cuban nationalists on behalf of a population oppressed by a colonial power. Indeed it was not the first time the Cubans had tried to shake off their Spanish overlords. In the 1870s, Cuban revolutionaries had waged a ten-year struggle for independence. Although there was considerable sympathy in the United States for the plight of the revolutionaries, and not a small amount of provocation from Spain, the US government remained neutral.

In 1895, the Cubans rose up against the Spanish colonial administration, which seemed just as determined to retain the island colony as they had been two decades earlier. The most influential Cuban nationalist in 1895 was the poet and writer José Martí. Martí called for an insurrection and in February of that year Cuban guerillas began attacking government installations and troops. In response, General Valeriano Weyler led some 150,000 Spanish troops across the Atlantic to quell the rising. What ensued was a war, the ferocity of which startled many. As in many such wars, civilians bore much of the suffering. In order to deprive the guerillas of food and support, Weyler ordered rural populations into camps without adequate food or sanitation and in which thousands died.

The United States took a keen interest in this war for a number of reasons. The US had invested some \$50 million in Cuba and the revolution was threatening this investment and damaging business interests. But this was not enough to explain the growing popular outrage at the Spanish actions in Cuba. By 1895, there were an

Discussion point

What role do civilians play in guerilla wars? How does this differ from their role in conventional wars? How have occupying powers tried to defeat guerilla forces during the 20th century?

3 • The emergence of the Americas in global affairs, 1880–1929

estimated 20,000 Cubans living in the United States and a number of these organized a committee to agitate in favor of independence, lobby the American government to recognize the revolutionary government organized by the rebels and to raise funds to fight the war. Centered in New York, this committee attempted to gain the support of organized labor, springing from the support of the cigar-makers union. The committee also fed sensational news stories to newspapers across the country. The infamous “Yellow Press” of William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer capitalized on these stories eventually sending their own correspondents to supply the lurid copy. Mass meetings and demonstrations were held in major cities such as Chicago, New York, Kansas City and Philadelphia. When the issue reached the floor of Congress, many of the ideological arguments for expansion were again voiced. Some argued that a free Cuba would mean expanded markets for US business. Others invoked the Monroe Doctrine in support of the rebels. A friendly Cuba could help the United States navy protect the eastern approaches to the much-heralded canal to be cut across the Isthmus of Panama in the same way that Hawaii could protect its western approaches. Despite this initial furor, interest in the plight of the revolutionaries did not hold the popular US imagination for long and President Cleveland steadfastly refused to intervene. Even during the 1896 election campaign, there was little talk of Cuba. The war, however, was hurting some American interests more than others. By 1897, the revolution in Cuba had significantly affected the sugar market in the United States. Likewise, tobacco imports from the embattled island were shrinking, driving prices higher.

The **Yellow Press** was originally a group of sensationalist newspapers in the United States at the end of the 19th century. Each newspaper tried to outsell their rivals by printing ever-more shocking stories. The atrocities, real and imagined, during the Cuban Revolution supplied a great deal of material for the yellow press.

Activity

The Yellow Press

In groups of three, choose a current event in your country that has two or more clearly identifiable and opposing positions. One of you write a newspaper article or draw a cartoon keeping as strictly as possible to the established facts of the event. The other two of you write a newspaper article or draw a political cartoon on that event in the style of the Yellow Press, each taking an opposing point of view. There are examples from the Spanish–American War at the PBS site on its series “The Crucible of Empire” (http://www.pbs.org/crucible/frames/_journalism.html).

Use the following chart to help:

Event?	Position?	Facts to emphasize?	Facts to ignore?	Symbols?	Audience?

Discussion questions:

- 1 How much did the three articles/cartoons differ from each other? Were there facts/ideas that appeared in all three accounts?
- 2 Analyze the language or symbols used in each of the accounts. To what extent are these used to evoke emotion or appeal to reason?
- 3 How is the choice of audience important to the writing/drawing of these articles/cartoons?
- 4 What is the value and limitation for the historian of using Yellow Press articles in understanding the past?

The US diplomatic response

President McKinley, who succeeded Cleveland, was more willing to confront the Spanish diplomatically over their conduct in the war than Cleveland had been, but stopped short of advocating US intervention. Nevertheless, he was torn by conflicting domestic sentiments about the war. The business lobby, on the whole, disliked the idea of war while some politicians of both parties advocated more aggressive action. Much of the public saw intervention in some way, shape or form as a moral duty while diplomats worried about the response of European powers to any sort of US involvement. McKinley attempted to strike a middle ground in his inaugural address by promising a foreign policy that was “firm and dignified ... just, impartial and ever watchful of our national honor ...” At the same time this foreign policy “want[ed] no wars of conquest.” His inaugural address went on to warn against the “temptation of territorial aggression.” The Yellow Press, nonetheless, continued to be filled with stories of Spanish cruelty in Cuba. McKinley, again trying to walk a middle line, put the Spanish government on notice that its conduct in Spain was unacceptable and that if it did not remedy the situation the United States would take further action. This threat seemed to have the desired result. The Spanish government recalled General Weyler and proposed some limited reforms. By the end of 1897, the Cuban insurrection again appeared to recede from the public eye in America.

“Ever watchful of our national honor” took on a more immediate meaning in early 1898. The Yellow Press, in this case the *New York Journal*, printed a letter that had been leaked from the Spanish ambassador in Washington, Dupuy de Lôme, to the Spanish government in Madrid in which he derides McKinley as a weak and

William McKinley (1843–1901)

Born in Ohio, William McKinley served a brief tenure as a school teacher and later enlisted as a private in the Union army during the civil war, achieving the rank of major before the end of the war. He studied law and entered into private practice in Canton, Ohio. After entering politics he was elected to Congress in 1877 and served there for 14 years when he left to become governor of Ohio. During and after his years in Congress, McKinley showed himself to be a fervent economic nationalist and protectionist. After becoming president in 1897, he revealed himself to be a skillful politician. The Spanish–American War dominated his presidency. During the first two years of the conflict McKinley tried to steer a cautious course that would not plunge the United States into war, despite growing pressure to do so. After the war, McKinley was persuaded by what he believed public opinion to favor—an extended imperial presence—and with this he acquiesced to the annexation of the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico. In September 1901, McKinley was assassinated while visiting Buffalo, New York, and was succeeded by his vice president, Theodore Roosevelt.



pandering politician. Although his political opponents in the United States made the same accusations, when they came from a foreign country they took on the robes of a national insult. Congress again took up the cause, dormant for some time, of recognition of the revolutionary government. A week later, a more serious and deadly blow to “national honor” occurred when the USS *Maine*, a US battleship, exploded in Havana harbor killing 260 of her crew.

McKinley’s response was initially measured. An inquiry was ordered into the causes of the explosion. The inquiry concluded that it had been an underwater mine that had touched off explosions in the ship’s magazines. Congress allocated \$50 million to the looming war and the press and the public increasingly called for aggressive action against Spain. Although still wary of war, McKinley went to Congress on April 11 for the authority to use force against the Spanish. The Teller Amendment, one of the resolutions that Congress passed authorizing the war, stated that the United States had no intention of annexing Cuba.

The United States invades the Philippines

On April 19, Congress authorized the use of force against the Spanish. Although Spain’s colonial holdings included Guam, Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Philippines, the fighting was largely contained to Cuba and the Philippines. The United States navy was well-prepared for the war. It was a modern fighting force that had developed a strategic plan should war with Spain come. Once the war broke, it put this plan into action. Commodore George Dewey assembled a squadron of seven ships of the American Asiatic Squadron in Hong Kong in February and with this force set out for Manila Bay in the Philippines in late April.

The Spanish naval force defending the islands consisted of older ships that were outgunned and out-armored by the US force, although the Spanish commander, Admiral Montojo, had hoped that shore batteries could support his ships in defending the islands against a US naval attack. The Spanish preparations were still underway when Dewey’s squadron arrived in the Philippines on April 30. After seeking out Montojo’s fleet, the United States attacked at dawn on May 1. After an hour and a half of action, the Spanish force was destroyed. But what to do now? Dewey had enough marines to hold the naval yards in Manila Bay, but not to wrest the city, much less the islands, from the Spanish troops stationed there. The US navy held the waters around the islands and waited for a landing force to arrive, which it had by the end of the summer and by August 13 the Philippines were in US hands. The first major success of the war, the Battle of Manila Bay, had been won half the globe away from the fight to free Cuba.

The United States army was not the modern fighting force that the United States navy was in 1898. At the outbreak of the war, the regular army consisted of 28,000 soldiers and officers spread out across the continent. State militias were estimated to have something under 115,000 additional men, although the federal government’s authority to press them into overseas service was debatable. Volunteers would be needed. In this instance, the war fever that had

Discussion point

What did McKinley mean by “national honor?” What type of affront to this honor do you think would provoke a war? What do you think would rouse your country to war?

Activity

President McKinley and war fever

There has been considerable historic debate on the forces that led President McKinley to war with Spain in 1898. Some historians have argued that it was the Yellow Press that incited the public to pressure the government to take action. Others have argued that it was the business lobby that influenced the president. Analyze the arguments of historians such as:

- Walter Lefebber
- Julius Pratt
- Howard Zinn
- Robert C. Hilderbrand
- John Dobson

gripped the country in the preceding months paid dividends. Citizens of the United States responded to the president's call for 125,000 volunteers enthusiastically. It was, however, one thing to call for 125,000 volunteers and quite another one to clothe, arm, equip, train and transport that many men.

These problems were soon obvious. As regulars and volunteers assembled in Florida, Tennessee, and Virginia for the anticipated invasion of Cuba, it became

evident that the army was not prepared. The camps were rife with disease. Despite the fact that they were going to fight in a tropical climate, the majority of the men were issued with the traditional dark woolen uniforms. While the regular troops were issued with modern repeating rifles, much of the volunteer force had to make do with the Springfield single-shot "Trapdoor" rifle.

Confusion also characterized the early command decisions made by the army. Lacking a coherent strategic plan prior to the Congressional resolutions, the army high command, led by General Nelson Miles, debated how to proceed and where to attack. Havana was considered and then rejected, as the bulk of the Spanish force was stationed there. Eventually, it was decided to launch an attack from the Florida camp, in Tampa, on Santiago. The regular army units were in Tampa as was the volunteer cavalry force that became known as the Rough Riders led by its second in command, Theodore Roosevelt. The Rough Riders, the regular army units and the state militia that embarked at Tampa on June 6 for the invasion numbered some 17,000 men and were led by General William Shafter. This force would face about 125,000 Spanish troops. Spain's land forces were augmented by a squadron of obsolete ships under the command of Admiral Cervera that had managed to elude the US fleet and slip into Santiago Harbor, only to be subsequently trapped.

After a chaotic landing in Cuba, the US forces moved toward Santiago. En route they fought the battles of El Caney and San Juan Hill, defeating the Spanish forces and by early July found themselves in front of Santiago, exhausted and lacking supplies. Within days the Spanish fleet attempted to break through the US naval blockade and was destroyed, leading the Spanish commander to negotiate the surrender of his forces defending Santiago. Meanwhile, a force of 18,000 US soldiers embarked for Puerto Rico, another Spanish Caribbean possession defended by 9,000 Spanish soldiers. After a series of battles in early August, the Puerto Rican campaign was cut short by an armistice signed by Spanish and US officials on August 10. The war had lasted a matter of months and cost the United States about 2,500 dead, only about 16 per cent of which were battle deaths, the remainder perishing from disease.



US troops crossing over a river, Philippines, 1899.



Of what strategic importance were the Philippines to the United States in 1899? What challenges did its occupation of the Philippines pose for the United States?

Discussion point

How did the Spanish–American War differ from the other wars that the United States fought in the 19th century? In what ways was it similar? What lesson might the US have taken from the organization and conduct of the war?

The aftermath: The imperial debate

From October to December 1898, US and Spanish representatives negotiated a treaty in Paris. The resulting Treaty of Paris ceded Puerto Rico and Guam to the United States. Cuba would gain her independence as the Teller Amendment prohibited its annexation. It was the Philippines that proved to be a difficult point. The Spanish were less ready to relinquish it than they had been their Caribbean possessions, but had no realistic way of holding them against American demands backed up by a naval squadron in Manila Bay. The United States for its part recognized the strategic importance of the islands to the growing China trade. In the end, the United States agreed to pay \$20 million for the Philippines. But the real debate was only getting started.

In the United States, the Treaty of Paris had to be ratified by the Senate with a two-thirds majority. Groups such as the **American Anti-Imperialist League** with prominent members like Mark Twain and Samuel Gompers formed to argue against the annexation of the Philippines. They were joined by many Democrats, sugar growers and isolationists. The Republican Party led by President McKinley, the navy and those who would benefit from increased Asian trade argued in favor of annexation. In early February 1899, the fate of the Philippines was put to the question in the Senate. Annexation carried the day by the narrowest of margins.

While the Teller Amendment ensured Cuba's nominal political independence, the United States still maintained an occupation force on the island until 1902. During this period American capital poured into Cuba. The infrastructure was modernized while the occupiers renovated the financial system and government administration. American fruit and tobacco companies bought up huge tracts of land such that by 1901 much of Cuba's economy and trade was dominated by the US. How, then, to protect these extensive interests while at the same time upholding the Teller Amendment in word if not in spirit? The answer came in the form of the Platt Amendment. Passed in 1901, the Platt Amendment "guaranteed" Cuban independence by forbidding Cuba from entering into any other foreign treaties. The amendment further reserved for the United States the right to intervene in Cuba to protect this independence and to be sold or leased military installations on the island for this purpose. Amid popular Cuban protests, the Platt Amendment became a part of the Cuban constitution.

The status of the Philippines was less complicated; it was part of the United States. In 1899, under the leadership of an erstwhile US ally, Emilio Aguinaldo, Filipinos rose against their colonizers and carried on a brutal guerilla war until 1901. By the time Aguinaldo was captured the US had come to understand the price of empire building—the war had occupied some close to 100,000 soldiers and cost close to 5,000 US lives. It is estimated that over 200,000 Filipinos died in the two and a half years of fighting. When William Taft took over the governorship of the Philippines in 1901 he embarked on a **paternalistic** program of reform that involved the construction of schools and infrastructure to support the US-dominated industry and the creation of a political assembly to practice a limited form of self-rule. Despite this, it would take the severe dislocations accompanying the end of the Second World War to secure Philippine independence.

The **American Anti-Imperialist League** was an organization formed by a wide cross-section of American society to fight against the growing sentiment that favored annexation of the Philippines after the US victory in the Spanish-American War.

Paternalism refers to an unequal relationship between two entities in which one is dominated by the other. In terms of imperialism it is the idea that the colony is not able to make its own decisions and that it is up to the colonizer to act for the colony and take care of it as though it were a child.

Activity**The imperial debate****Source A**

The following is an excerpt from an essay written in August 1898 by Andrew Carnegie, a wealthy steel magnate and vice-president of the Anti-Imperialist League.

To reduce it to the concrete, the question is: Shall we attempt to establish ourselves as a power in the far East and possess the Philippines for glory? The glory we already have, in Dewey's victory overcoming the power of Spain in a manner which adds one more to the many laurels of the American navy, which, from its infancy till now, has divided the laurels with Britain upon the sea. The Philippines have about seven and a half millions of people, composed of races bitterly hostile to one another, alien races, ignorant of our language and institutions. Americans cannot be grown there. The islands have been exploited for the benefit of Spain, against whom they have twice rebelled, like the Cubans. But even Spain has received little pecuniary benefit from them. The estimated revenue of the Philippines in 1894–95 was £2,715,980, the expenditure being £2,656,026, leaving a net result of about \$300,000. The United States could obtain even this trifling sum from the inhabitants only by oppressing them as Spain has done. But, if we take the Philippines, we shall be forced to govern them as generously as Britain governs her dependencies, which means that they will yield us nothing, and probably be a source of annual expense. Certainly, they will be a grievous drain upon revenue if we consider the enormous army and navy which we shall be forced to maintain upon their account.

Source: Carnegie, Andrew. "Distant Possessions: The Parting of the Ways." *The Gospel of Wealth*. New York: The Century Co. 1901.

Source B

The following is an excerpt of a speech given by Albert Beveridge, a Senator from Indiana.

The Opposition tells us that we ought not to govern a people without their consent. I answer, The rule of liberty that all just government derives its authority from the consent of the governed, applies only to those 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. How do they know what our government would be without their consent? Would not the people of the Philippines prefer the just, humane, civilizing government of this Republic to the savage, bloody rule of pillage and extortion from which we have rescued them?

Source: Beveridge, Albert J. "The March of the Flag." 1898. *History Tools.org: Resources for the Study of American History*. <http://www.historytools.org/sources/beveridge.html>.



Source C

President McKinley related the following to General James Rusling in 1899. Rusling recalled the conversation for an interview in 1901.

When next I realized that the Philippines had dropped into our laps I confess I did not know what to do with them ... I walked the floor of the White House night after night until midnight; and I am not ashamed to tell you, gentlemen, that I went down on my knees and prayed Almighty God for light and guidance. ... And one night late it came to me this way. ...

- 1 That we could not give them back to Spain—that would be cowardly and dishonorable;
- 2 That we could not turn them over to France or Germany—our commercial 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 worse than Spain's war;
- 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 as our fellow men for whom Christ also died.

Source: Rusling, General James. "Interview with President William McKinley." *The Christian Advocate*. 22 January 1903. p. 17. Reprinted in Schirmer, Daniel and Roskamm Shalom, Stephen. (eds.) 1987. *The Philippines Reader*. Boston: South End Press. pp. 22–23.

Questions

- 1 What does Carnegie mean by "glory"? (source A)
- 2 What evidence is there of a practical approach to the issue of imperialism in each of the documents?
- 3 What evidence is there of ethnocentrism in the documents?
- 4 Compare and contrast how the people of the Philippines are regarded in sources A and B.
- 5 What role did religion play in McKinley's decision to annex the Philippines, according to Rusling?
- 6 With reference to its origin and purpose, evaluate the value and limitations of source C to historians studying McKinley's decision to annex the Philippines.

Activity

Nationalist reaction

In groups of two, research the post Spanish–American War positions of Cuban nationalists and Filipino nationalists. Write a speech from your allocated country's perspective. Come together and write a joint essay, comparing and contrasting postwar nationalism in Cuba and the Philippines.