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U.S. History Readers

U.S. Foreign Policy, 1898–1920

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U.S. Foreign Policy, 1898–1920

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U.S. Foreign Policy, 1898–1920

This unit raises the fundamental question of whether the foreign policy decisions made during this period were generally in keeping with America’s ideals and with its legitimate self-interests. Teachers may use this material to provide in-depth studies of important foreign policy decisions and to replace the basal text’s traditional coverage of this period.

Each chapter in this unit raises a question of its own. For example, the first chapter asks whether the U.S. should have declared war against Spain to free Cuba and whether the newly freed nation should have been pressured to sign the Platt Amendment. The second chapter asks whether the U.S. should have kept the Philippines and describes the revolt against U.S.’s annexation. Chapter 3 questions the decision to inspire a revolt in Panama in order to obtain the land needed to build the Panama Canal, and Chapter 4 inquires into the motives for the Roosevelt Corollary and dollar diplomacy. The scene shifts to war in Europe in Chapters 5–9 with in-depth examinations of a neutrality policy as applied to the sinking of the *Lusitania*, arguments for and against declaring war on Germany, a simulation on negotiating the Versailles Treaty, and a debate on the U.S. committing itself to protecting members of the League of Nations against foreign attack.

Each chapter is also designed to accommodate a wide range of student abilities. The first part of every chapter is written at a lower reading and conceptual level than the second part. The two parts are separated by a series of student exercises, including a graphic organizer and several questions intended to help students master basic information and stimulate higher-order thinking skills. The second part of each chapter, “For Further Consideration,” is written at a higher reading and conceptual level. It is followed by a question that requires students to write a strong paragraph and/or be prepared to present their opinions in class. In some cases, this section continues the story; in others, it challenges students to think deeply about issues related to the overarching question raised in the unit. In addition, I (Inquiry)-Charts help students optimize what they already know or think about a topic and integrate it with identifiable additional information they find in the text. Finally, each lesson includes vocabulary words and key terms in a flash-card format; these can be used either for review or reference.

This unit is also designed to stimulate informed discussions and higher-order thinking skills rather than focusing on recitation and rote learning. It provides students with the information they need to acquire and share factually supported opinions and to consider important philosophic issues. In the first part of this unit, students can decide whether the U.S. should have declared war on Cuba and kept the Philippines. They then evaluate America’s Panama intrigues and Teddy Roosevelt’s “big stick” diplomacy. The second part provides opportunities for students to debate how the U.S. should have responded to the sinking of the *Lusitania*, decide whether America should have declared war on Germany, question the need for legislation on the home front to limit civil liberties, simulate the Versailles Conference, and discuss joining the League of Nations.

Chapter 1. “Cuba Libre” and the Platt Amendment Teacher Page

Overview:

This chapter covers both the decision to free Cuba from Spanish rule and to saddle Cubans with the Platt Amendment. It presents the background to the U.S.’s intervention in Cuba’s second revolution against gross misrule by Spain. The chapter also covers the scorched-earth policies followed by Cuban revolutionaries, the atrocities committed by Spanish soldiers, the *reconcentrado* camps, the sinking of the *Maine* (by internal or external explosion), McKinley’s indecisive war message, and the Teller Resolution. The graphic organizer asks students to place specific facts mentioned in the text under one of three headings: the case for declaring war on Spain, the case against declaring war on Spain, or not relevant to either case. Students are given the opportunity to decide whether Congress should have voted for a declaration of war against Spain for the sole purpose of freeing Cuba.

The “For Further Consideration” section briefly describes the successful war with Spain, the U.S.’s generous efforts to restore Cuba’s infrastructure and economy, and the Platt Amendment. Advanced students are asked to assume the role of a Cuban or a U.S. patriot and write an argument for or against coercing Cubans to sign the controversial Platt Amendment.

Objectives:

Students will:

- understand that Spanish misrule and atrocities inflamed Cubans’ desire for independence
- see that Spain made conciliatory gestures that might have led to a peaceful path toward Cuban independence
- know that the U.S. made noble efforts to restore Cuba’s economy after years of warfare
- understand that the Platt Amendment severely limited Cuba’s autonomy and violated the promise implied by the Teller Resolution
- be able to argue pro or con on the issues of declaring war against Spain and pressuring Cuba to sign the Platt Amendment

Strategies:

Before class: Since teaching this chapter could and should occupy two days, assign the readings accordingly. Note that the “For Further Consideration” section could be assigned for the second day of class.

In class: On day one, ask your class whether older students have the responsibility to protect a younger student from being bullied. Next, carry this analogy to the U.S.

helping a neighboring country being tyrannized and exploited by a foreign power. Ask students to share their answers to the student exercise questions and make sure they know and understand the correct answer to each question. Follow this exercise by reviewing their answers to the Graphic Organizer and encourage them to discuss their reasons for choosing from the three categories: supports the case for going to war, supports the case for not going, or irrelevant to either case. With this preparation, students will be ready to discuss the optional essay question: Should Congress have declared war on Spain in order to free Cuba?

On the second day of class, which is devoted to the Spanish American War, ask students to review the basic facts in this section—i.e., the U.S.'s easy victories in the war, its generous support for the Cuban economy, and the provisions of the Platt Amendment. Follow up by asking students who have assumed the roles of a Cuban or an American patriot to share their responses to the following question: Should the U.S. have pressured Cuba to accept the Platt Amendment as part of their constitution? A thought-provoking discussion on this issue should follow.

Chapter 1. “Cuba Libre” and the Platt Amendment I-Chart

	How bad was Spain’s rule of Cuba?	What was the Teller Resolution?	Was the Platt Amendment necessary or an unfair imposition?
What I already know			
What I learned from Chapter 1, Part I			
What I learned from Chapter 1, Part II			
What I would still like to learn			

Chapter 1—"Cuba Libre" and the Platt Amendment

restitution**guerrilla warfare****investigation****despoiled****imposition****yellow journalism****participants****reparations****reconcentrados**

Chapter 1—"Cuba Libre" and the Platt Amendment

<p>Payment for damages done</p>	<p>War conducted by hit-and-run tactics</p>	<p>A careful and detailed examination to decide cause or who was at fault; usually done by an official</p>
<p>Damaged, ruined, or robbed; having the value of something destroyed, often by force</p>	<p>Something disagreeable someone is pressured to do</p>	<p>Sensational newspaper stories greatly exaggerating events for the purpose of selling papers or influencing public opinion</p>
<p>People who take part in something</p>	<p>Repayment for injury caused</p>	<p>Spanish for "concentration camps"</p>

Chapter 1

“Cuba Libre” and the Platt Amendment

Introduction

“Cuba libre” (Spanish for “free Cuba”) was the battle cry for Americans who fought against Spain in 1898 to help Cuba become a free and independent country. Cuba, an island only 90 miles from the United States, had been ruled by Spain for almost 400 years. When Cubans began to rebel against Spanish rule in 1895, it was their second major rebellion against Spain in fewer than 20 years. News of the first rebellion did not make headlines in the United States, but news of the second rebellion did. Stories of the terrible conditions suffered by the Cuban people, their desire for freedom, and the brutal means used to suppress their rebellion were printed in horrifying detail. These descriptions aroused the sympathy of many Americans. The question facing the American people was whether they should take military action to help free the people of Cuba. You will be asked to answer the same question at the end of this chapter.

Tactics of a Revolution

Cuba’s desire for independence in the 19th century took the form of two major rebellions against Spain. The first one lasted from 1868 to 1878. Over 200,000 Cubans lost their lives in this ten-year bitter struggle, which ended with Spain promising to give Cubans the right to rule themselves. However, the Spanish failed to live up to this promise, and for freedom-loving Cubans all the fighting and death had been in vain.



Jose Martí

One of the Cuban patriots who fought in this revolution was Jose Martí. Martí came to the U.S. after the failed revolution and devoted the rest of his life to freeing his country. His poetry, his speeches, his talks, and his fundraising were all directed toward “Cuba Libre.” After years of preparation, Martí and a close companion, Maximo Gomez, secretly landed in Cuba. However, Martí was killed soon afterwards and Gomez was left alone to carry out their plans.

Gomez did not have the military support needed to attack Spanish armies directly. He therefore decided to use the tactics of guerrilla warfare. His men would make lightning attacks on Spanish outposts and then retreat before reinforcements could arrive. In addition, Gomez ran a campaign of mass destruction. By burning fields, destroying sugar mills, and other private property, Gomez hoped to make Cuba so unprofitable that Spain would leave.

At first, the Spanish tried to negotiate with Gomez, but the guerrilla leader did not trust the Spanish because he remembered that Spain did not carry out the promise it made in 1878. Spain then sent an army of 200,000 soldiers to Cuba and placed them under the command of General Weyler. The cruel tactics Weyler used against Cuban rebels earned him the title “the Butcher.” Weyler forced Cuban peasants from their homes and put them into concentration camps called *reconcentrados*. He claimed that he was merely preventing Spanish farmers from being forced to join the guerrilla army.



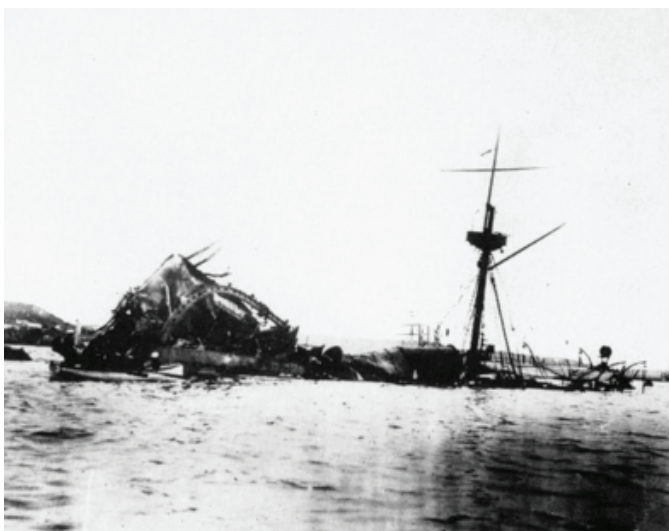
General Weyler

Reporting a Revolution

American newspapers engaged in a competition to sell papers reported extensively on the events in Cuba. Many of the reports, in what came to be known as “yellow journalism,” were exaggerated, and in some cases, not even true. Whether true or not, these reports helped push U.S. public opinion toward declaring war against Spain in order to free Cuba:

November 7, 1897	<i>NEW YORK WORLD</i>	3 cents
<p>Havana, Cuba, Nov. 6, 1897 you would sicken at the sight of these 30,000 non-combatants, chiefly women and innocents dying at the hands of Spanish children have perished within a few weeks, butchers, well versed in the art of killing.</p>		

The Controversy Over the *Maine*



War with Spain might have been avoided if the American battleship, the USS *Maine*, had not been sunk while on a goodwill mission in Havana, Cuba. War might have been avoided also if the Spanish had not been suspected of sinking this battleship. The disaster cost the lives of 260 American officers and enlisted men. President McKinley urged Americans to remain calm while an investigation into the cause of the sinking was completed. The

report concluded that an external force, possibly a torpedo or a mine, had caused the explosion. The major evidence for this conclusion was the “way the keel and bottom plating of the ship were driven upward to form an inverted V.” An investigation conducted by the Spanish, however, concluded that the explosion came from within the ship. Their major supporting evidence stemmed from the lack of dead fish or a column of water usually associated with underwater explosions. The Spanish report claimed that the cause of the explosion “was a spontaneous combustion of coal dust in the ship’s coal bins which in turn ignited its ammunition.”

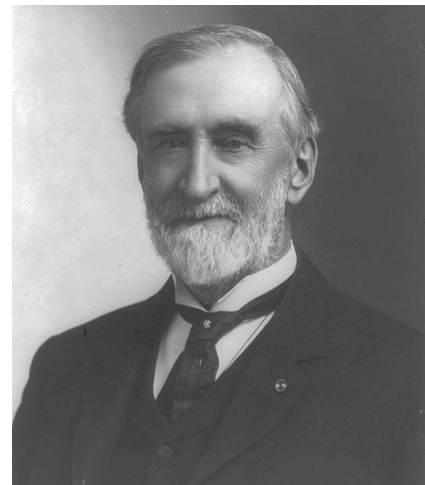
The Spanish report on the cause of the explosion was sent to President McKinley on April 2, 1898. By that time, Americans were too excited by events in Cuba to spend much time carefully considering the conflicting reports. An editorial in the *New York World* both reflected and informed the public opinion at that time:

A nation that will consent to have its ships blown up by submarine mines without demanding and enforcing instant reparation (repayment) has no business with a navy. It should [limit] itself to growing crops, building railroads, gambling in stocks and running Sunday schools.

The destruction of the Maine by foul play should be made the [reason] of ordering our fleet to Havana and demanding proper amends within forty-eight hours, under a threat of bombardment!

The Proctor Report

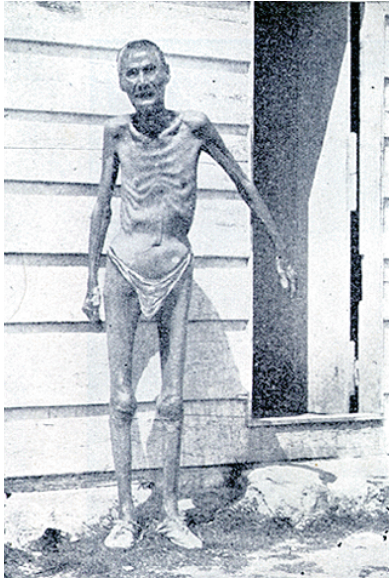
About the time news of the USS *Maine* had made headlines throughout the country, a respected Senator, Redfield Proctor, traveled to Cuba. He was not willing to believe the stories he read in the papers so he came to Cuba to see what was happening. Known for his honesty and impartiality, he gave the American people a report that had great influence on public opinion:



Senator Redfield Proctor

All the country people in the four western provinces, about 400,000 in number, remaining outside the fortified towns when Weyler's order was made, were driven into these towns and these are the *reconcentrados*.

Their huts are about 10 by 25 feet in size and are crowded together very closely. They have no floor but the ground, no furniture, and little clothing. The commonest sanitary provisions



are impossible. Conditions are unmentionable in every respect. Torn from their homes, with foul earth, air, water, and food, no wonder that one-half have died, and that one-quarter of the living cannot be saved... Little children are still walking about with arms and chest terribly emaciated, eyes swollen, and stomach bloated to three times the natural size. The doctors say these cases are hopeless...

I went to Cuba believing that the newspapers had exaggerated the cases of starvation and suffering. I could not believe that out of a population of 1,600,000, two hundred thousand had died within these Spanish forts from actual starvation. To me the strongest appeal (for war) is the entire native population of Cuba is struggling for freedom and deliverance from the worst misgovernment of which I ever had knowledge.

A Call to Arms

On April 11, 1898, shortly after the Proctor Report, President McKinley asked Congress for the power to stop the bloodshed in Cuba. Among the grounds for such intervention, the President listed the following:

First: In the cause of humanity and to put an end to the barbarities, bloodshed, starvation, and horrible miseries now existing there, and which the parties to the conflict are unable or unwilling to stop ...

Second: We owe it to our citizens in Cuba to afford them that protection...for life and property which no government there can or will afford.

Third: The right to intervene may be justified by the serious injury to the commerce, trade, and business of our people.¹

¹ McKinley was referring to the fact that \$50 million of Americans' property had been destroyed, and that the U.S. lost \$70 million in trade

Toward the end of his war message, the President told Congress that Spain was willing to let impartial experts decide who was responsible for destroying the USS *Maine*. The President also reported that the Queen of Spain had directed the Commander in Chief in Cuba “to stop the fighting” but had not told him how long this cease-fire would last. Having given reasons for the U.S. to go to war and reasons for not going, President McKinley let Congress decide what to do:

This fact along with every other pertinent consideration will, I am sure, have your just and careful attention in the solemn deliberations upon which you are bound to enter.

The Teller Resolution

Eight days later, the U.S. House and Senate prepared to vote on a declaration of war on Spain. Senator Henry Teller drew up a resolution to accompany the declaration. It would commit the U.S. to freeing Cuba and pledged the United States not to keep or govern it:

First: That the people of the Island of Cuba are, and 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 [surrender] its authority and government in the island of Cuba and withdraw its land and navy forces from Cuba and Cuban waters.

Third: That the President of the United States be, and hereby is, directed and empowered to use the entire land and navy forces of the United States to carry these resolutions into effect.

Fourth: That the United States hereby disclaims any...intention to exercise...control over said island...[and] to leave the government and control of the island to its people.

The question whether to declare war against Spain for the sole purpose of freeing Cuba was now up to Congress to decide.

Student Activities

A. Student Exercises

1. Why do you think the first Cuban rebellion against Spain didn't capture the attention of Americans but the second rebellion did?
2. Why did Gomez turn to guerrilla warfare tactics in his quest to free the Cuban people from Spanish rule?
3. What were the conditions like in the reconcentrados? Why might the Spanish have allowed such suffering to go on?
4. Summarize the main points of McKinley's war message and the Teller Amendment.