

TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT

The Media and the Spanish American War

Grade - 11 (Advanced 20th Century History)

Length of class period – 84 Minutes (lesson takes 1 period)

Inquiry – (What essential question are students answering, what problem are they solving, or what decision are they making?)

What were the causes of the Spanish American War and which local newspaper was most “yellow”?

Objectives (What content and skills do you expect students to learn from this lesson?)

1. Identify the causes of the Spanish American War
2. Define Yellow Journalism
3. Distinguish between Yellow Journalism and more responsible media
4. Evaluate the role of the media in the US entering into war with Spain

Materials (What primary sources or local resources are the basis for this lesson? – (materials, compiled from a variety of resources, attached below)

1. Various articles from the *NY Times*, *Norwich Bulletin*, *New London Day*, *Willimantic Daily Chronicle*, and *Hartford Courant*
2. Yellow Press examples

Activities (What will you and your students do during the lesson to promote learning?)

1. Intro:
 - Explain that the Spanish American War would be a turning point in America’s role in the world, firmly establishing the US as an imperial power.
 - Remind students that Spain had once been a major world power. At the height of their empire, about 1790s, what did they control (Spanish-speaking South America, much of the Caribbean, Florida, the American West and Southwest)? Students may not know that they also had a presence in the Asian Pacific Islands, controlling the Philippines.
 - However, by the 1890s, Spain was vastly weakened, with few holdings remaining, including Cuba and Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and few others.
 - Remind students that the US has a long history with Cuba. What do they know of that history? Did anyone hear that Fidel Castro resigned as leader of Cuba after nearly 50 years of power (he took control in 1959)? Other points students or I may bring up: Bay of Pigs, Missile Crisis, Embargo, Git-mo and the War on Terror. Explain that the US influence in Cuba began in the era of the Spanish American War.
 - Explain that even though this is a war with Spain, it will be fought in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines.
 - Tell students that today, we’ll be looking at the causes of the Spanish American War, and the role of the media.

- Remind students that we're looking in this unit at the larger questions of how America's role in the world changed and how the arts, media, and technology influenced this change.
2. Background notes:
 - Cuba, just 90 miles off the coast of Florida, was chaffing under Spanish rule. This led to a series of revolts:
 - 1868: Cubans revolted. Took Spain 10 years to quell the rebellion.
 - After the revolt, over \$50 million worth of American investment poured into Cuba, mostly into the sugar industry, which made up 4/5's of the Cuban economy.
 - The US was the largest buyer of Cuban sugar and Cuban-American trade was almost \$100 per year.
 - The depression of 1893 however, led to calls for Congress to protect American sugar producers, so in 1894, Congress put a 40% tariff on sugar imports from Cuba. (Resulting in Cuban sugar being much more expensive, so Americans don't buy as much, and the Cuban economy declines).
 - As the Cuban economy declined, the Cubans again became restless under Spanish rule. Another revolt began in 1895.
 - Spain sent over 120,000 troops to fight the approximately 60,000 Cuban rebels.
 - Each side aimed for the Cuban economy:
 - The Cuban rebels, led by Maximo Gomez, tried to cut off Spanish garrisons from food. Sugar growers were ordered to stop producing, and small farmers were forbidden from selling to the Spanish
 - The Spanish, led by General Valeriano Weyler, tried to isolate the rebels from the rest of the population in the countryside by herding Cuban peasants into reconcentration camps that lacked adequate supplies.
 - The US sent the ship the USS Maine to Havana, Cuba in late January, 1898. It explodes on February 15th and the papers in the States report it on the 16th.
 3. This leads to the question: How did the US end up involved in Cuba's revolt against Spanish rule? Explain that to answer that question, students are going to read local newspaper accounts from the time period.
 4. Explain that in a time before TV and radio, and with an increasingly literate population, newspapers played an important role in getting information to people. Historians estimate that 25% of the population over age 10 read at least one newspaper a week.
 5. Put students into groups of approximately 4 and give each group a set of articles with which to work. Tell them that they are to read as many articles as they can, but to make sure that each article gets read by at least one person. Each group should have articles that deal with the following:
 - Evidence of US economic involvement in Cuba
 - The de Lome letter
 - The Reconcentrados
 - Growing patriotism
 - Cuban desire for independence
 - Maine Explosion
 - Misc. article
 6. Their task is to be able to explain why the United States declared war on Spain on April 20, 1898.

7. Give students time to read and discuss articles. As a class, discuss group findings. (Note: 266 men killed on the Maine. A 1976 investigation found that the Maine was sunk due to a self-inflicted blast, probably as a result of coal bunker fire on board. Woodford, one of the names in some of the articles served as the U.S. Ambassador to Spain in the months leading up to the war. Secretary Long is John Davis Long, Secretary of the Navy)
8. Give students copies of the Yellow Press (so named because they each had a comic strip called *The Yellow Kid*) headlines and articles. William Randolph Hearst ran the *New York Journal*, and Joseph Pulitzer ran *New York World*. Explain that these newspapers were often accused of being sensational. In fact, when Frederick Remington, one of Hearst's artists asked to come home because there was nothing going on, Hearst is reported to have said, "Please remain. You furnish the pictures, and I'll furnish the war." It is unclear whether or not Hearst actually said this, but it tells us something about how Yellow Journalism was perceived.
9. Discuss how the Yellow Journalism articles differ from the ones that they just looked at with their groups.
10. Have them get back together with their groups and compare the articles they read with the Yellow Press headlines. Which local paper does each group think is most sensational and why?
11. Closure: Explain that the Spanish American War has been called the first media war and the "Newspaper War." Yet, we can see that some newspapers were more reputable than others. Discuss how, in general, we can distinguish between responsible journalism and sensational journalism. Additional question, time permitting: Was this enough to go to war over?

How will you assess what student learned during this lesson?

1. Observation of group work and class discussion
2. Homework paragraphs: Some argue that the press pushed McKinley and Congress into war. Do they believe that is an accurate assessment? Why or why not? Write 2-3 paragraphs explaining your answer. Be sure to quote from the articles provided.
3. Test items

Connecticut Framework Performance Standards –

Content Standard 1: Historical Thinking

- formulate historical questions and hypotheses from multiple perspectives, using multiple sources
- evaluate data within the historical, social, political and economic context in which it was created, testing its credibility and evaluating its bias
- describe the multiple intersecting causes of events
- use primary source documents to analyze multiple perspectives

Content Standard 8: International Relations

- identify and analyze the various domestic, political, economic and social interests which play roles in the development of foreign policy
- describe and analyze the process by which foreign policy decisions are developed and executed

Content Standard 14: Economic Systems

- understand the causes and effects of periods of growth and recession evident in the history of market economies

Articles I used (there are other articles attached to this lesson that could be used)

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Evidence of US economic involvement in Cuba	<i>Stafford and the Cuban Question, Norwich Bulletin, Feb. 22, 1898</i>	<i>Warship for Havana, Hartford Courant, Jan. 25, 1898</i>	<i>Stafford and the Cuban Question, Norwich Bulletin, Feb. 22, 1898</i>
The de Lome letter	<i>Delome on the President, New York Times, Feb. 9, 1898</i>	<i>Woodford's Late Note, Hartford Courant, Feb. 9, 1898</i>	<i>Woodford's Late Note, Hartford Courant, Feb. 9, 1898</i>
The Reconcentrados	<i>What Proctor Saw, Willimantic Daily Chronicle, March 11, 1898 and Starving to Death in Stricken Cuba, New London Day, Feb. 23, 1898</i>	<i>The Reconcentrados, Norwich Bulletin, Feb. 23, 1898</i>	<i>Appeal for Cubans, Hartford Courant, Feb. 1, 1898</i>
Growing patriotism	<i>Volunteers from Danbury, Hartford Courant, Feb. 25, 1898</i>	<i>American Patriotism, Willimantic Daily Chronicle, Feb. 28, 1898</i>	<i>Offer Services in Case of War, New London Day, Feb. 28, 1898 and Maine Benefit Concert, Hartford Courant, Mar. 5, 1898</i>
Cuban desire for independence	<i>Independence or Death, Norwich Bulletin, March 18, 1898</i>	<i>All Talk Now of War, New York Times, April 3, 1898</i>	<i>Independence or Death, Norwich Bulletin, March 18, 1898</i>
Maine Explosion	<i>Survivors...Divers to Investigate, Norwich Bulletin, Feb. 17, 1898</i>	<i>Warship Maine Blown Up in Havana Harbor, New London Day, Feb. 16, 1898</i>	<i>Treachery, Say Congressmen, Willimantic Daily Chronicle, Feb. 17, 1898</i>
Misc. article	<i>Will Not Head Off the Vizcaya, Norwich Bulletin, Feb. 17, 1898</i>	<i>The Beehive Ad, New London Day, Feb. 26, 1898</i>	<i>Thread City Boy One of the Maine's Many Dead, Willimantic Daily Chronicle, Feb. 17, 1898</i>