

To what extent was 'yellow journalism responsible for instigating the spanish-ame...

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Introduction The brief Spanish-American War that lasted from April 1898 through to August 1898 was fought over the issue of the liberation of Cuba, a Spanish colony that was suffering under the brutality of Spain's authority. "The war essentially grew out of Cuba's struggle for independence. Since the early 19th century, many Americans had watched with sympathy the series of revolutions that ended Spanish authority throughout the Americas", yet it was in Cuba where Spain kept their autocracy alive. The reason surrounding this was Spain's quest of re-imagining its empire as the rightful possessor of the countries in the Americas; unlike British and French empires, liberal Spanish elite Canovas del Castillo argued that dissemination of civilization was Spain's unique contribution to the New World" and thus Cuba was deemed to be an integral part of the Spanish nation. United States of America's intervention in this matter can be best judged as both moralistic and pertaining to diplomatic and political policies that the country abided by. Firstly, moralistic in the sense that the American nation cringed and empathized simultaneously for Cuba as it suffered under Spain's blatant autocracy; so much so that in the Cuban revolution of 1895, financial support for the "Cuba Libre" rebellion came from some external organizations which were based in United States. Secondly, many of United State's imports flowed in from Cuba and investments in to the sugar and tobacco plantations were thriving. By 1895, investments reached 50 million US dollars; although Cuba remained Spanish territory politically, economically it started to depend on the United States. "Disrupting this prosperous period would not only have been detrimental to Cuba's economy but to United State's economy as well. Thirdly, the "policy of Munroe Doctrine which was

introduced on December 2, 1823, said that further efforts by European countries to colonize land or interfere with states in the Americas would be viewed by the United States of America as acts of aggression requiring US intervention. The Doctrine affirmed that USA would not interfere in the internal concerns of European countries given that the Western hemisphere was not further colonized. Keeping this in mind and being fully aware of it, Spain chose to assert ownership of Cuba which America found unacceptable. Yellow Journalism is a well known technical term in the world of Journalism; referring to the deliberate downplaying of genuine news in favor of shocking, sensational and eye-catching ones or over dramatizing/exaggerating events with the motive to sell more papers and ignite a certain emotion in its readers.

This term was perhaps first created when William Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer of two giant New York Publications competed against each other for the most circulations. This rivalry peaked from about 1895 to 1898, also the period of the Cuban revolutions. Yellow Journalism and its power of persuasion was aimed at freeing Cuba during this period and it worked enough to instigate an armed military conflict between United States and Spain. From this, the research question ??? To what extent was 'Yellow Journalism' responsible for instigating the Spanish-American War of 1898? , therefore arises.

In order to answer this question, the investigation will look at the different causes that sparked the Spanish-American war and analyze their nature to see which cause affected what aspect of Cuban-Spanish-American tensions, which ultimately resulted in war. Even though political, economical and

social causes were overriding factors that ensured war, Yellow Journalism awakened a nation, America, to alleged atrocities in Cuba and forced them to take direct action. For this reason, the author of this investigation will argue that Yellow Journalism was responsible to a greater extent for initiating the Spanish-American War.

The reason the author picked this particular topic was that it combines two of her favorite passions together to provide her with a research question narrow and interesting enough for her to investigate upon; History and Journalism. The author's lifelong ambition has been to become a journalist so to write a thesis involving journalism's impact, however much so, on a particular part of the world at a particular time provided immense knowledge to her about my career option and also intrigued and interested me enough to work on this Extended Essay with sense of satisfaction.

The Spanish-American War of 1898 has been part of her syllabus for IB History HL and diverging further into this War and its different aspects in her own time opened her eyes to its prominent link with Journalism; which is how the author took a broad subject such as a War and narrowed it down to a specific facet that can be investigated for her Extended Essay. Pre-Spanish American War/Early Media Coverage The most oft-repeated alleged conversations prior to the Spanish American War and concerning it was that between Frederic Remington and William Randolph Hearst, the owner of New York Journal. Hearst had sent Remington and reputed writer Richard Harding Davis to Havana, Cuba in January of 1897 in order to capture the turmoil and tribulations resulting from the Cuban Revolutions and promoting his paper

with the vivid, often exaggerated stories. Following the revolutions, Cuba enjoyed a rare seemingly peaceful period which aggravated Remington. He wired Hearst saying " Everything is quiet. There is no trouble. There will be no war.

I wish to return. " Hearst's controversial reply was " Please remain. You furnish the pictures and I'll furnish the war". " The supposed exchange suggests not only reckless arrogance by Hearst but also speaks to the powerful potential effects of the news media. That, indeed, was the intent of James Creelman, the sole original source for the anecdote" . Creelman wrote in " The Great Highway", " Some time before the destruction of the battleship Maine in the harbor of Havana, the New York Journal sent Frederic Remington, the distinguished artist, to Cuba.

He was instructed to remain there until the war began; for ??? yellow journalism' was alert and had an eye for the future. " . According to Hearst, this incident never took place although it remains one of the most controversial myths related to Spanish American War. About the time of the Cuban Revolution that lasted from 1895-1898, Spanish troops under the supervision of General Valeriano " Butcher" Weyler unfairly captured citizens of Havana and put them in camps to retaliate to the cry for independence; " he insisted that ' war should be ended with war'. The Spanish Army was not able to provide sufficient food and water supplies to these camps and casualties were high, and " American journalists stationed in Cuba estimated the casualties to be high as 400, 000 ??? almost a quarter of the Cuban population" throughout the years of the revolution. Capitalizing on this

warfare, the American press were far from letting up since stories of the Cuban revolution and its progress would sell papers. " A newspaper by the name of Humboldt Times carried this association press story on Feb 16th 1898 : A Female Insurgent Captured Havana, Feb. 5 — Seniorita Isabelle Rubio, an Amazon, was captured, after being wounded, in a skirmish between a detachment of Spanish troops and some insurgents. She joined the insurgents at the invitation of the late Antonio Maceo. She belongs to a prominent family. " That was not all; readers in America were greeted in the morning with allegations of " battles in Cuba that never happened, " Spanish brutality that never took place and even such flights of fancy as repeated stories of beautiful, savage Cuban Amazon warriors, serving the Revolution as Cavalry and showing no mercy to the hated Spaniard. Such kind of eye-catching and fallacious lies were exactly what caught the reader's eye and the American Press feeded of the attention and delivered exactly what the American nation wanted ??? a reason for assisting Cuba in ridding it's country of Spanish tyranny. But is such bold and misleading journalism the true cause of the Spanish war? Very likely. It can be said that these publications roused anger, disgust and passion in millions including the general public, politicians and the president in different ways but which were linked with Yellow Journalism ultimately. February 1898 Post-1897 George Cleveland held the position as the President of United States of America, the first president to consider the Cuban war, and he proclaimed US neutrality and urged Spain to seek a political settlement; in time the Cleveland administration became convinced that Cuba would fare better under Spanish sovereignty that would provide more safety and stability on the island. " In

March 1897 however, when William McKinley became president, his views on Cuba were unknown. "The new president and his administration, unlike Cleveland, finally decided that peace on the island would most likely come from ending Spanish rule in Cuba".

The president had hardly prepared himself for a war when two incidents in February of 1898 practically paved the way for the war. The tension in America was at boiling point as the alleged Spanish brutality in Cuba was nearing a genocide ??? or so the infamous Yellow Press made it seem. What was about to happen in February however would give the journalists a field day that they could never have wished for. "The Worst Insult" On the morning of February 9th, both the American Press and Spanish empire was left reeling when both the New York Journal and San Francisco Examiner found and released a letter containing derogatory remarks aimed towards current president McKinley and written by the Spanish minister to the United States, Enrique Dupuy de Lome, to Jose Canalejas, an influential Spanish editor and politician. "A Cuban junta had smuggled away and then ferried the letter to both the Journal and Joseph Pulitzer's New York World. In the missive, de Lome said McKinley was 'weak and catering to the rabble and besides a low politician who desires to leave a door open to me and to stand well with the jingoes of his party'. Publications all over the country scrambled to capitalize on this opportunity of having an eye-catching headline and news to increase circulation and arouse America further; the Examiner's headline exclaimed with a feigned rage "Spain's Minister Insults with the American President" and deliberately exaggerated an excerpt from the letter that took a negative stab at journalists. Hearst's The Journal was not far

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behind with the melodramatic cry of "The Worst Insult to the United States in its History", to refresh readers mind of this incident ??? reprinted the letter in full and termed de Lome as "abusive".

And to further elevate tensions, on February 10th, the Examiner published a succinct yet accurate front page story headlined "Porto Rico the point of attack." "It is understood that in case of war with Spain the Administration's military and naval program includes the immediate seizure of Porto (sic) Rico, as well as the investment of Cuba. Believing the war would be an extremely short one, it would be advisable that Porto Rico should be held ... in order to completely dispose of Spanish title possessions in the Western Hemisphere. The Examiner hardly knew how accurate its prediction would turn out. This example of manipulative journalism is precisely the reason historians such as historian of Spanish-American War, Patrick Mcsherry, blames Yellow Journalism for the instigation of the Spanish-American war. Analyzing the incidents above, it is easily inferred that if the letter was not blown out of proportion, it would have probably have had a significantly small impact on McKinley and thus resulted in less of an inclination towards war.

The precise contents of the letter are unknown but it would not be incorrect to state that the Journalism cleverly altered its contents to gather a more powerful reaction from its readers and to give the American President something to begrudge the Spaniards about. "Sinking of Maine" "In the captain's cabin, Charles Sigsbee sat at a table writing a letter to his wife. The trouble in Cuba, he wrote, would soon be over. The new Spanish governor of

the island seemed to have the situation under control. During the three weeks that the Maine had been in Havana, Captain Sigsbee had seen no sign of Cuban rebels.

He'd entertained the Spanish officers in his mess, and he and his staff had been entertained lavishly by the local officials. Although Sigsbee found the bullfights to which he'd been invited somewhat barbaric, the Spanish officers behaved as perfect gentlemen. Aboard the Maine, " taps" sounded at ten minutes past nine. Captain Sigsbee describes what happened next. I laid down my pen and listened to the notes of the bugle, which were singularly beautiful in the oppressive stillness of the night. . . . I was enclosing my letter in its envelope when the explosion came.

It was a bursting, rending, and crashing roar of immense volume, largely metallic in character. It was followed by heavy, ominous metallic sounds. There was a trembling and lurching motion of the vessel, a list to port. The electric lights went out. Then there was intense blackness and smoke. The situation could not be mistaken. The Maine was blown up and sinking. For a moment the instinct of self-preservation took charge of me, but this was immediately dominated by the habit of command. Captain Sigsbee managed to reach the deck, now slanted down sharply toward the submerged bow.

He climbed aft toward the only part of the ship that was not awash. Fires had broken out all over the vessel, and they lit the harbor in an eerie red glow. In Havana lights began to shine from windows that had just been smashed by the blast. Most of the crew had been asleep in their berths at the forward part of the ship, which was already at the bottom of the harbor. The stern

sunk more slowly. " On February 15th, a terrible tragedy struck the vessel called " USS Maine" that was sent to Havana, Cuba to protect the American citizens residing in Cuba at that time; unexpectedly, the great battleship sank when her engine exploded.

This conclusion was obviously reached after the war when extensive investigation was undertaken but what followed immediately after the sinking of the great battleship was a frenzy of vicious reporting that was determined to start a war. It seemed like there was not a shred of doubt in the American's press mind as to how was responsible for the destruction of Maine. However, the Yellow Press was shockingly factual in its reporting for the first few hours but that was soon not the case as the press tried harder than ever to persuade America that this was the tipping point and no country should get away for destroying what's America's own.

There were some subtle insinuations such as Examiners headline " The Question on Every Lip is, ' Did a Spanish Torpedo Do the Awful Work? "' " Universally printed was Capt. Sigsbee's telegram to the Navy Department which included official notice of the explosion and a warning that ' public notice should be suspended until further report'. " . The New York World went as far as to assert in one of its articles " there's doubt whether the explosion was ON Maine". Hearst however clearly outdid The Examiner and World with its far-fetched theories and false pictures. By the 17th, the Hearst papers, at least, had given up all pretense of believing the explosion was an accident; ' MAINE BLOWN UP BY TORPEDO' with small type reading ' Such is the belief now gaining ground' and ' May Have been anchored over a mine'

underneath graced the cover of that day's Examiner, which publicized the Journal's offer of \$50, 000 for ' information furnished to them exclusively which shall lead to the detection and conviction of the person, or persons, or Government criminals which resulted in the destruction at Havana of the United States warship Maine'. . Hearst even went as far as publishing pictures to show how Spanish opposition had " fastened an underwater mine to the Maine and detonated it from the shore. " Once again, the press's ardent journalism and love of far-fetched stories to arouse emotions and increase circulation had worked its charm. If it was not sure if Spaniards had destroyed Maine, it was positively sure that a war was fast approaching; this was highlighted by the stories of military in the newspapers almost every day.

The Examiner would go as far as to show military bases in the Bay area and also offer suggestions such as keeping guard over the Golden Gate should the Spanish fleet happen to sail to Philippines from there. As the frenzy surrounding the sinking of Maine grew, people started becoming aware of the press's power in manipulating situations with the press of a button; journalist Edwin. L Godkin of the Nation, reprimanded both the Journal and the World. " Nothing so disgraceful as the behavior of ... these newspapers in the ast week has been known in the history of American journalism. " Secretary Long of the Navy noted, " Underneath there is an intense excitement. The slightest spark is liable to result in war with Spain. " Journalism's Path to War After the Maine fiasco, President McKinley was under immense pressure to act against the Spanish government, despite any concrete evidence of Spain's involvement with the sinking of Maine.

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Americans all over the nation were crying for justice perpetrated by none other than The Media. Historian David Trask says that no one in the Administration would have entertained the possibility of war, had it not been for the ungovernable uproar throughout the country that followed the destruction of the Maine. " At this point in time it seemed as if the general consensus was that a war was due to rid Cuba of Spanish rule and to avenge the sinking of Maine. Newspapers were publishing articles that were putting pressure on the government to act as soon as possible. The World pressurized the government by declaring " American Women Ready to Give up Husbands, Sons and Sweethearts to Defend Nation's Honor. Making up these statements was stirring America from a half asleep slumber and making her demand for justice until it was given to them in the form of a war. The vicious circle including newspapers stories for public pressure growth, then eventual actual pressure growth, then more newspaper stories was expanding by day and McKinley was under pressure to stop his negotiation with Spain to make a ceasefire and have an outright battle. The Congress then decided to do something that would prove illegal in these times; it took the objectionable action of sending troops to war without the President's approval.

According to " The War With Spain in 1898", by David Trask, " McKinley finally asked for authority to intervene in Cuba because he no longer felt able to resist the manifold pressures that poured in upon him, especially from representatives of his party in Congress reflecting the passions of their constituents. " " If there ever was a ' popular war' — one forced upon a reluctant leadership by the people — it was this one. The views of the voters,

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as refracted through Congress, found expression in April 1898 only after President McKinley had unsuccessfully called upon all of his political skill to frustrate them. It seems that what truly drove McKinley to go to war against his own wishes and desires was the much pressured public opinions and a plethora of it. Ever since the Sinking of Maine, America had been roused and brainwashed to the point of total submission to its whim, by the Yellow Press. It was almost as if the press was the leader making the foreign policies and the President had no choice but to heed. Conclusion After meticulous analyses and evaluation, it can be clearly seen that if it weren't for Yellow Journalism and its catalyst tendencies, the Spanish-American War might have never even have happened.

From the pre-Spanish American War times till the very end of the War, Yellow Press dominates the main player in the game in which it fabricates, manipulates and executes to perfection. Managing to stir emotions of sympathy, anger and disgust in response to Cuba's condition and patriotism to the alleged injustice that had been done to them by the destruction of America's favorite warship, Maine and insulting of the President, the Press never failed to stir the passion they required to sell their papers.

It is debatable whether the press really only used their methods to sell papers or to get America to respond to a good cause but either way, they succeeded in achieving both. While researching for this research question, another one springs to mind; namely, is it accurate to state that Yellow Journalism was to blame and not to credit with instigating the Spanish American War? In fact, if it wasn't for the war, Cuba would have suffered

greatly and probably procured more casualties over the years if the tyranny was not broken somehow.

Keeping this in mind, Yellow Journalism might have acted for the good will of a country depending on United States of America for economic and political support and to blame it would be unjust. That research question might make up the basis for another investigation but this investigation concludes with the assertion that Yellow Journalism was indeed to blame to a great extent for instigating the Spanish American War. BIBLIOGRAPHY 1. Schmidt-Nowara, Christopher, *The Conquest of History*, (University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 2006) 2. Navarro, Jose Canton. *History of*

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