

# 1898: The opposition to the Spanish-American war

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*Abstract.* This article focuses on the months before the Spanish-American war began in April 1898 and addresses two related questions: first, why was the opposition to the war so strong in the United States; second, why did it not prevail? To explore these questions, the papers of the McKinley administration are examined, along with the Congressional Record and forty-one US newspapers, as well as twelve major European newspapers (British, French, German and Spanish) and the relevant documents from the British and Spanish archives. It is only in the press that one can find a coherent, well-articulated and explicit explanation of the antiwar position.

Scholars have long sought to explain why the United States went to war against Spain in April 1898. They have overlooked, however, an equally important question – why did Washington delay so long?<sup>1</sup>

Consider the facts. First, the legacy of the past. Americans had thought of Cuba as part of the US sphere for almost a century. ‘Geographically and commercially, the struggle in Cuba is on American soil’, the *Atlanta Constitution* asserted in March 1898.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Americans had long felt contempt and hostility toward Spain. ‘Never did a nation act towards another with more perfidy and injustice than Spain has constantly practiced against us’, President Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1807. Ninety years later, Spain was still seen as the aggressor, the United States the victim. ‘The history of the dealings of the United States with Spain has been a history of dignity and

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<sup>1</sup> For the most important works on the causes of the war see Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1898* (Ithaca, NY, 1963), pp. 326–417; Julius Pratt, *Expansionists of 1898: The Acquisition of Hawaii and the Spanish Islands*, [1936] (New York, 1964), pp. 230–78; Louis Pérez, *The War of 1898: The United States and Cuba in History and Historiography* (Chapel Hill, 1998); David Trask, *The War with Spain in 1898* (New York, 1981), pp. 1–59; John Offner, *An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States and Spain over Cuba, 1895–1898* (Chapel Hill, 1992); Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and the Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, 1998); David Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Trade and Investment: American Economic Expansion in the Hemisphere, 1865–1900* (Columbia, MO, 1998), pp. 325–56.

<sup>2</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 24 March 1898, p. 4 (ed.). The Louisiana Purchase, in 1803, fuelled President Thomas Jefferson’s desire to acquire Cuba.

patience repaid by insult', the *Chicago Journal* concluded in February 1898. 'Spain ... is our deadly enemy, treacherous, cruel, and unforgiving.' This contempt and hostility deepened after the Cuban revolt broke out in February 1895 – contempt for Spain's inability to defeat the rebels and hostility for the cruelty of its repression. As members of the US Congress and US newspapers heaped abuse on Spain, the Spaniards returned the favour. 'The American people have been characterised on the floor of the Spanish Parliament as a nation of lowborn shopkeepers, and the Spanish press has taken it up as a crow does carrion', the *Baltimore American* wrote. 'They think we are both afraid to fight and unready to fight', the *Chicago Journal* told its readers.<sup>3</sup> To add injury to insults, US investment in Cuba was grievously hurt by the war, the prosperous US trade with the island was crippled, US citizens were imprisoned by the Spanish authorities, and US warships spent time and money enforcing the neutrality laws which banned the shipment of arms and munitions from the United States to the rebels.

Next, consider the context: the Cuban revolt unfolded against a backdrop of growing US assertiveness in the hemisphere. 'Today the United States is practically sovereign on this continent and its fiat is law', Secretary of State Richard Olney told the British prime minister in July 1895. A few months later mighty Britain effectively acknowledged the Monroe doctrine, by recognising the right of the United States to intervene in its border dispute with Venezuela. But Spain, miserable, hateful Spain which was waging a savage war in the US backyard, rejected offers of mediation out of hand. For many people in the USA this rejection was an insult. President William McKinley must intervene in Cuba, Senator William Mason (R-III) warned, or 'the Monroe doctrine is a lie.'<sup>4</sup> US restraint seems all the more surprising because Spain was so weak. The United States was an economic giant of seventy-four million people, Spain a nation of 17 million, largely illiterate, economically backward and financially bankrupt, without allies, its army exhausted, and its fleet in no condition to fight.

Given this backdrop, therefore, one must wonder why it took so long for the United States to go to war against Spain. This article focuses on the months before hostilities began, as the debate over relations with Spain grew particularly intense, and addresses two related questions: first, why was the opposition to war so strong; second, why did it not prevail?

<sup>3</sup> Jefferson to Bowdoin, 2 April 1807, in H. A. Washington (ed.), *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (New York, 1859), 5: 64; *Chicago Journal*, 11 Feb. 1898, p. 4 (ed.) and 10 Feb., p. 4 (ed.); *Baltimore American*, 10 Feb. 1898, p. 6 (ed.); *Chicago Journal*, 16 March 1898, p. 4 (ed.).

<sup>4</sup> Olney to Bayard, 20 July 1895, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1895, 1: 545–61; Senator William Mason (R-IL), 9 Feb. 1898, *Congressional Record* (hereafter *CR*), 55th Cong., 2nd sess., p. 1581.

*The Anti-War Forces*

The papers of the McKinley administration are not very helpful in answering these questions. The heavily mined collections of documents that are available – the papers of McKinley, of his aides, and the diplomatic record – shed little light on the president's motivations.<sup>5</sup> As one of McKinley's foremost biographers has noted, 'the inner minds of few public men have been so well concealed.'<sup>6</sup>

Congressional documents also disappoint. With a few unimportant exceptions, the minutes of committee meetings and hearings have not been preserved. And of the more than 4,000 pages of the *Congressional Record* that cover the months from 6 December 1897 – when the second session of the 55th Congress began – through the approval of the joint resolution providing for armed intervention in Cuba on 19 April, only a few hundred pages deal with Cuba and Spain, and they are not enlightening.

Those members of Congress who spoke in favour of Cuban independence, who wanted the United States to grant the Cubans belligerent rights or to order Spain to leave the island, were often eloquent and rarely brief. Those opposed to the war were more terse. In eighteen weeks of intermittent and often intense debate very few of them explained why they opposed the war, and when they did they did not elaborate. They said they supported the president's wise policy; that war would lead to a 'lessening in morality'; that the United States was not 'the regulator of the wrongs of earth'; that Spain had 'a greater right to subdue rebellion in that island [Cuba] than the United States had to force the Confederate states back in the Union'; that the Spanish government was mending its ways; that the rebels were 'themselves ... much at fault' for the suffering of the Cuban people. One representative and three senators warned that the war would be costly: Henry Johnson (R-Ind.) told the House that it would 'shake the business interests of this country to the foundation ... [and] arrest all of our recuperation and development'. Senator Donelson Caffery (D-La.) called Spain 'a cripple', but added that if war came, the Spaniards 'will sweep our ships from the seas' and 'thousands of our young men' would die. Senator George Hoar

<sup>5</sup> In addition to reading the relevant secondary sources, I have examined the papers of William McKinley, George B. Cortelyou, William Rufus Day and John Bassett Moore at the Library of Congress. (Of the Day papers, the most relevant files are: General Correspondence, boxes 5–10; Subject File, 1897–1901, esp. box 35; of the McKinley papers, series 1, 2, 7 and 12; of the Cortelyou papers, boxes 52, 56 and 68; of the Moore papers, box 185.) I have also examined the reports of the US ambassador to Madrid (see n. 21).

<sup>6</sup> Margaret Leach, *In the Days of McKinley* (New York, 1959), p. 36. See also Wayne Morgan, *William McKinley and His America* (Syracuse, 1963); Ernest May, *Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of America as a Great Power* (New York, 1961); Lewis Gould, *The Presidency of William McKinley* (Lawrence, KA, 1980).

(R-Mass.) told the Senate one week before hostilities began: ‘If we enter upon this war, we are to subject our ships to many disasters like that of the *Maine* and our soldiers to pestilence and yellow fever ... to say nothing of the increase of the debt and of the pension list’. Two days later, Senator George Wellington (R-Md.) warned, ‘If war comes, it will open a veritable Pandora’s box of ills. Our foreign commerce will be paralysed, our trade crippled, industries come to a standstill, the arm of labour will be lamed, taxes will increase, values become unsettled, the currency deranged, and the public debt augmented. If war comes, the thunder of guns ... will bring death and disaster to our men, sorrow to our homes, contaminating diseases to our shores.’<sup>7</sup> Maddeningly, none of the four explained why fighting a third-rate power like Spain would be so costly.

It is only in the press – among those papers that the *New York Times* called ‘the peace-at-any-price faction’ – that one can find a coherent, well-articulated and explicit explanation of the anti-war position.<sup>8</sup> I have read forty-one US newspapers, focusing on the months before the outbreak of the war. My sample includes Republican, Democratic and independent papers. In selecting them, I was guided by their circulation and by the political importance of their readership.<sup>9</sup> These two criteria have skewed my sample in favour of the Atlantic seaboard and the Midwest: seventeen New York papers, five from Chicago, five from Boston, two from both Omaha and San Francisco, and one from Baltimore, Washington, Richmond,

<sup>7</sup> Quotations from: Senator Donelson Caffery (D-LA), 14 April 1898, *CR*, 55th Cong., 2nd sess., p. 3844; David Henderson (R-IOWA), 2 March 1898, *ibid.*, p. 2618; John Maddox (D-GA), 4 April 1898, *ibid.*, p. 3515; Senator George Wellington (R-Md), 16 April 1898, *ibid.*, p. 3951; Henry Johnson (R-Ind), 20 Jan. 1898, *ibid.*, p. 800; Caffery, 14 April 1898, *ibid.*, p. 3893; Senator George Hoar (R-Mass.), 14 April 1898, *ibid.*, p. 3831; Wellington, 16 April 1898, *ibid.*, p. 3952.

<sup>8</sup> *New York Times*, 3 April 1898, p. 18. Two useful overviews of the press are George Auxier, ‘The Cuban Question as Reflected in the Editorial Comments of Middle Western Newspapers (1895–1898),’ PhD Diss., Ohio State University, 1938, and Arthur Barnes, ‘American Intervention in Cuba and Annexation of the Philippines: An Analysis of the Public Discussion,’ PhD Diss., Cornell University, 1948. There are also some studies focusing on the press in individual states. The most useful are James Lindgren, ‘The Apostasy of a Southern Anti-Imperialist: Joseph Bryan, the Spanish-American War, and Business Expansion,’ *Southern Studies*, Summer 1991, pp. 151–78; William Schellings, ‘Florida and the Cuban Revolution, 1895–1898,’ *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 31 (1960): 175–86; William Schellings, ‘The Advent of the Spanish-American War, 1898,’ *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 31 (1960): 311–29; Harold Sylvester, ‘The Kansas Press and the Coming of the Spanish-American War,’ *The Historian*, Feb. 1969, pp. 251–67; Carmen González López-Briones, ‘The Indiana Press and the Coming of the Spanish-American War, 1895–1898,’ *Atlantis*, June 1990, pp. 165–76; Joseph Wisan, *The Cuban Crisis as Reflected in the New York Press (1895–1898)* [1934] (New York, 1977); Marcus Wilkerson, *Public Opinion and the Spanish-American War* (Baton Rouge, 1932).

<sup>9</sup> For their circulation I have relied on N. W. Ayer and Son’s, *American Newspaper Annual*, Philadelphia, 1897 and 1898.

Atlanta, New Orleans, Topeka, Emporia (because of the prominence of its editor, William Allen White), Cleveland, Minneapolis and Seattle.<sup>10</sup> I have also read, for comparative purposes, twelve European papers: six British, two French, two German and two Spanish.<sup>11</sup>

In order to get a sense of the debate in the US press, I have not limited myself to anti-war papers: eight of the papers in my sample advocated war or measures that would lead to war before the *Maine* blew up; twelve joined the pro-war ranks in the wake of the explosion; thirteen strongly opposed the war until hostilities began. The borders between the groups are fluid. For example, the *Wall Street Journal* and Dun's *Review* opposed the war, but their opposition was muted. The New York *Herald*, the New York *Commercial Advertiser* and the Chicago *Times-Herald* came out in favour of war in March, but with such extreme reluctance that it is misleading to include them in the pro-war ranks. A few papers took no position on the war or had an inconsistent editorial line.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> In this full list those papers that had a clear political affiliation are identified:

- New York: *Bankers' Magazine*, *Journal of Commerce and Commercial Bulletin* (hereafter *Journal of Commerce*), *Commercial Advertiser* (R), *Herald* (hereafter NYH), *Harper's Weekly*, *Commercial and Financial Chronicle* (hereafter *Chronicle*), *Journal and Advertiser* (D) (hereafter *Journal*), *New York Times*, *Tribune* (R), *Seaboard*, *American Monthly Review of Reviews*, *Literary Digest*, *Army and Navy Journal*, *Dun's Review*, *Bradstreet's*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Scientific American*.
- Chicago: *Times-Herald*, *Tribune* (R), *Inter Ocean* (R), *Journal* (R), and *Chronicle* (D).
- Boston: *Herald*, *Transcript* (R), *Journal of Commerce*, *United States Investor*, and *Atlantic Monthly*.
- Omaha: *Bee* (R) and *World-Herald* (D); San Francisco: *Chronicle* and *Call* (R).
- Also: Baltimore *American* (R), Washington *Post*, Richmond *Dispatch* (D), Atlanta *Constitution* (D), New Orleans *Times-Democrat* (D), Emporia *Gazette* (R), Topeka *State Journal* (R), Cleveland *Leader* (R), Minneapolis *Tribune* (R), and Seattle *Post-Intelligencer* (R).

<sup>11</sup> The *Saturday Review*, *Speaker*, *Westminster Gazette*, *Times*, *Fortnightly Review*, and *Engineer* (all from London); the Paris dailies *Le Temps* and *Journal des Débats*; the German dailies *Neue Preussische Zeitung* (Berlin) and *Kölnische Zeitung* (Cologne); the Madrid dailies *El Imparcial* and *La Epoca*.

<sup>12</sup> Strongly anti-war papers: New York: *Bankers' Magazine*, *Journal of Commerce*, *Harper's Weekly*, *Chronicle*; Boston: *Transcript*, *Herald*, *Journal of Commerce*, *United States Investor*; elsewhere: Richmond *Dispatch*, San Francisco *Chronicle*, Omaha *Bee*, Baltimore *American*; Emporia *Gazette*.

- Pro-war before the *Maine*: New York *Journal*; Chicago: *Tribune*, *Inter Ocean*, *Journal*; Omaha *World-Herald*, New Orleans *Times-Democrat*, Atlanta *Constitution*, Minneapolis *Tribune*.
- Joined the pro-war ranks after the *Maine*: *Seaboard*, *American Monthly Review of Reviews*, *New York Times*, *New York Tribune*, Chicago *Chronicle*, Washington *Post*, Topeka *State Journal*, San Francisco *Call*, Seattle *Post-Intelligencer*. And, with the qualification noted in the text, Chicago *Times-Herald*, New York *Herald* and *Commercial Advertiser*.
- Others: *Literary Digest*, *Army and Navy Journal*, *Dun's Review*, *Bradstreet's*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Scientific American*, *Atlantic Monthly*, Cleveland *Leader*.

The anti-war press argued its case in a manner that was strikingly consistent and hinged on two key points: the war would exact a heavy toll and it would be bereft of rewards. Whereas Senator Hoar and his three colleagues had merely stated that the war would be costly, the anti-war press explained in detail, and with technical arguments, why it would be so. Therefore, in this article, I will examine the anti-war press's assessment of the relative strength of the United States and Spain at sea and on land, as well as its fear that if war broke out one or more European powers would come to Spain's aid. I will then explore the proposition that a victorious war would bring no rewards to the United States. Thirdly, I will examine the impact of the explosion of the Maine on the anti-war press. Finally, I will assess whether the United States' easy triumph over Spain proves that the fears of the anti-war newspapers were groundless.

### *The Context*

When the revolt broke out in Cuba in February 1895, the United States was mired in a severe economic, social and political crisis. As the 1896 elections approached, it seemed to many conservatives in the United States that the entire social fabric of the country was at stake. The Democratic Party had been hijacked, according to these conservatives, by the followers of William J. Bryan, whose battle cry was free coinage of silver? Free silver, Bryan promised, would break the thrall of the eastern financiers and create a more just society, but he was defeated in the November elections, and in 1897 the economy, depressed since 1893, began to improve. Conservatives celebrated the 'signs of returning prosperity' but warned that danger still lurked: the silverites had been beaten but not crushed, and the recovery was fragile. Furthermore, the last six months of 1897 saw a large budget deficit of almost \$50 million. This affected the Congress' view of foreign relations, for the economy demanded that congressmen 'mend their ways', as the conservative New York *Chronicle* warned in October 1897. 'If we are to indulge a quarrelsome attitude with reference to every international difference, it will be equally idle to anticipate a surplus' because military expenses would have to increase.<sup>13</sup> The most important foreign policy issues facing the United States as 1898 began were whether to annexe Hawaii, how to respond to the European scramble for China, and, at the top of the list, the Cuban question – the only crisis that threatened to involve the United States in a foreign war.

<sup>13</sup> Quotations from *Bankers' Magazine*, Sept. 1897, p. 335 and New York *Chronicle*, 2 Oct. 1897, p. 596.

*The Spanish Fleet*

Most pro-war advocates stressed how easy it would be to defeat Spain. 'Spain stands as an imbecile among the powers of Europe', the *Chicago Inter Ocean* explained in January 1898. 'Poor and heavily in debt, its military resources are so limited that it cannot even subdue a little rebellion like that in Cuba'. Spain, the *Chicago Tribune* jeered, 'is a poor, broken down, decrepit, bankrupt nation. The United States, the most powerful nation on the globe, in a conflict with Spain would only have to crook its little finger, the job would be so easy.'<sup>14</sup>

Anti-war papers disagreed. They worried about the strength of the Spanish navy, they worried about the Spanish army in Cuba, and they worried about the risk of foreign intervention on Spain's behalf.

The strength of a navy in the 1890s was measured in battleships and armoured cruisers. (Armoured cruisers were less powerfully armed and protected than battleships, but faster.) But there were two types of small craft that, many believed, might revolutionise naval warfare: torpedo boats and destroyers. Destroyers 'have the light and more or less numerous gun-armaments, which are the terror of torpedo-boats', a prominent British naval authority, Admiral Philip Colomb, explained, 'and they have ... the torpedoes which are the terror of battle-ships and cruisers'. No one could know how effective the destroyers might be – they had never been used in war – but they were, a scholar has noted, 'very much at the cutting-edge of technology of the day, as a new jet fighter would be now'.<sup>15</sup>

'By an odd coincidence', the *London Times* wrote on 14 April 1898, 'both the United States and Spain began what may be described as the rehabilitation of their navies at about the same period', in the mid-1880s. But the United States had focused on battleships, the Spaniards on armoured cruisers and torpedo boats. Both countries' fleets were relatively small – neither was a naval power of the first rank, but, as the *Times* remarked, 'the squadrons assembled for action on opposite sides of the Atlantic contain specimens of naval architecture which any State might be proud to own'.<sup>16</sup>

*Scientific American* explained, 'Spain would go into the war ... with a homogeneous, compact, and very formidable fleet – one which, if properly handled and bravely fought, would be a by no means unworthy opponent for the powerful ships of the United States. Each fleet would be strong where the other is weak.' The United States had four 'mighty battleships'

<sup>14</sup> *Chicago Inter Ocean*, 30 Jan. 1898, p. 36 (ed.) and 1 March, p. 6 (ed.); *Chicago Tribune*, 21 March 1898, p. 6 (ed.).

<sup>15</sup> Quotations from Philip Colomb, 'Naval Warfare in the Future', *National Review* (London), March 1897, p. 923, and David Lyon, *The First Destroyers* (Annapolis, 1996), p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> *London Times*, 14 April 1898, p. 6.

and more lightly armoured cruisers, but Spain had her ‘deadly destroyers’ and ‘a magnificent fleet of eight swift, heavily-armed and heavily armoured cruisers, similar in size, speed and power, and admirably adapted to act in a concerted fleet action. There is no nation in the world that possesses such a fleet, not even England.’<sup>17</sup>

Of course, these descriptions addressed the two fleets on paper. As the US naval attaché in Paris later wrote, there was ‘no secrecy about the plans of ships already built and in service’, and therefore ‘the plans of all Spain’s ships were known to all the world in detail for all practical purposes’.<sup>18</sup> What was not known was that the Spanish warships were in poor condition and their ordnance in disrepair. ‘As will be seen in the tragic letters of [Admiral] Cervera’, a senior US naval officer wrote in 1911, referring to the letters of the admiral who commanded the main Spanish fleet during the war, ‘Spain was without the primal necessities of a fleet: without guns, without ammunition, without engineers, without coal, and even with the ships short of bread’.<sup>19</sup> It is striking, with hindsight, how unaware observers and naval experts, in Europe as well as in the United States, were of the plight of the Spanish navy. As one of the foremost authorities on the war, Graham Cosmas, writes, ‘most naval experts in the United States and abroad considered the Spanish armoured squadron a match for the American. ... American officers believed that indifferent crews and poor maintenance might reduce the performance of the Spanish vessels, but it would be dangerous to assume these factors in advance of proof in action. At the first strategy conferences in April of 1898, American naval planners, quite sensibly, treated the Spanish fleet as a dangerous, powerful opponent.’<sup>20</sup> They

<sup>17</sup> *Scientific American*, 2 April 1898, pp. 216, 218. This article is a detailed, knowledgeable comparison of the two fleets, but it included two armoured cruisers that in fact had not yet been fully completed, a common error. (See ‘The Military Forces of Spain. Compiled in the Intelligence Division, War Office, and Corrected to April 1898’, p. 24, [end April 1898], FO 881/7016, Public Record Office, Kew, Surrey [hereafter PRO].) The US navy had four first-class battleships and, until the explosion of the *Maine*, two second-class battleships.

<sup>18</sup> Sims, letter to the editor, 8 Aug. 1914, *New York Times*, 11 Aug. 1914, p. 8. See also Jeffery Dorwart, *The Office of Naval Intelligence: The Birth of America’s First Intelligence Agency, 1865–1918* (Annapolis, 1979), p. 48, and Theodore Ropp, *The Development of a Modern Navy: French Naval Policy, 1871–1904*, [1932] (Annapolis, 1987), p. 228.

<sup>19</sup> French Ensor Chadwick, *The Relations of the United States and Spain: The Spanish American War* (New York, 1911), 1: 46. For Cervera’s letters, see Pascual Cervera (ed.), *Colección de documentos referentes a la Escuadra de Operaciones de las Antillas*, [1899] (Madrid, 1986). For the real strength of the two navies, see Chadwick’s *Relations*, 1: 28–46; Agustín Rodríguez González, *Política naval de la Restauración (1875–1898)* (Madrid, 1988), pp. 454–86; Víctor Concas, *La Escuadra del Almirante Cervera*, [1899] (Madrid, 1998); Hugo O’Donnell, ‘La Armada: proyectos y realidades de una política naval’, in J. P. Fusi and A. Niño (eds.), *Vísperas del 98: Orígenes y antecedentes de la crisis del 98* (Madrid, 1997), pp. 104–13.

<sup>20</sup> Graham Cosmas, *An Army for Empire: The United States Army and the Spanish-American War* (Shippensburg, PA, rev. ed. 1994), p. 96. Immediately after the war, Mahan wrote, ‘The



certainly received no better advice from US officials in Europe. The reports of the US ambassador in Madrid are silent about Spain's military strength as are those of the US naval attachés in Berlin and London. The naval attaché in Madrid, Lt. George Dyer, made a virtue of discretion: 'By the advice of the [US] Minister [to Spain] and at his express desire and in accordance with my judgement of the situation,' he told Assistant Secretary Theodore Roosevelt in late March 1898, 'I have kept out of sight as much as possible, so as to avoid complications for him which would be sure to arise here under any other course'. Therefore, his reports on the Spanish Navy consisted, in the main, of 'newspaper cuttings'.<sup>21</sup> Only the naval attaché in Paris, the well-respected William Sims, sent any substantive information, and it tended to exaggerate Spanish naval strength. 'It is the general opinion of French officers with whom I have talked on the subject', he wrote on 25 March, 'that the ships of the Spanish Navy are kept in good condition, and crews well drilled; and from information that I have been able [to] collect, I am of the same opinion'.<sup>22</sup> (In 1901, Roosevelt wrote to his brother-in-law that 'prior to the outbreak of the Spanish war, he [Sims] actually believed the Spanish vessels were better than ours.'<sup>23</sup>)

Not surprisingly, then, what the pro-war press stressed, in arguing that Spain's fleet would be easily destroyed, was not the sorry state of the Spanish navy – of which it was unaware – but the power of the US battleships and, above all, 'the quality of American seamanship', as the Seattle *Post-Intelligencer* put it. 'The real strength of a navy', the Chicago *Inter Ocean* explained, 'cannot be determined by equipment. The bravery and skill of the men, from commander down, are very important factors. ... American sea dogs of

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force of the Spanish Navy – on paper, as the expression goes – was so nearly equal to our own that it was well within the limits of possibility that an unlucky incident – the loss, for example, of a battleship – might make the Spaniard decisively superior in nominal, or even in actual, available force.' Alfred Thayer Mahan, *Lessons of the War with Spain and Other Articles* [1899] (Boston, 1918), p. 31.

<sup>21</sup> Lt. Dyer to Assistant Secretary Theodore Roosevelt, Madrid, 23 March 1898, Record Group (hereafter RG) 38, entry (hereafter E) 90, v. 25, National Archives (hereafter NA). For the dispatches of the US ambassador in Spain, see Despatches from US Ministers to Spain, 1792–1906, RG 59, rolls 123 and 124, NA. For the reports of the naval attachés in Berlin and London, see Albert P. Niblack Letterbook, RG 45, E 302, NA and John C. Colwell Letterbook, RG 38, E 90, NA.

<sup>22</sup> Sims to Roosevelt, Paris, 25 March 1898, RG 38, E 90, v. 12, NA. For praise of Sims, see Assistant Secretary Roosevelt: 'Once more the Department's attention is called to the energy, zeal, and intelligence that you have displayed in the collection of so much valuable information [on the Russian navy] in so short a time, meeting in a high degree the confidence reposed in you.' Roosevelt to Sims, Washington DC, 2 Dec. 1897, Papers of William Sowden Sims, box 12, Library of Congress (hereafter LOC). This letter is not included in Elting Morison (ed.), *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1951).

<sup>23</sup> Roosevelt to Cowles, Washington DC, 12 Dec. 1901, in Morison, *Letters*, 3: 206–7.

war ... have a fighting record unsurpassed in the annals of nations'. Spanish sailors, on the other hand, were second-class Frenchmen, and lacked, the *Washington Post* said, 'the intellectual calibre ... initiative and resource of mind' that characterised US sailors. Pro-war papers had 'supreme confidence', the *Scientific American* pointed out, in the superiority of 'the men behind the guns', US sailors over the Spanish. 'We have the best fighting boys of any navy in the world', the *Chicago Tribune* boasted. 'The boys would not ask for more than twenty-four hours with the Spanish navy.'<sup>24</sup>

But here was the rub. The US Navy found it difficult to man the fleet. And a large number of the 'men behind the guns' on US warships were foreigners. 'One of the gravest difficulties that the Government has to meet is the lack of competent seamen', the authoritative *Seaboard* wrote in March 1898. 'Even Spain is superior to us in the matter of men, and she is a nation infinitely inferior to us in every aspect, except in ships of war and peace.' (The small size of the US merchant marine meant, many believed, that the United States lacked a ready reserve of trained crews.) The *Washington Post*, which, like *Seaboard*, had reversed its anti-war stance in the aftermath of the *Maine*, lamented, on 4 April, 'the difficulty in inducing competent men to come forward and offer their services ... so inadequate is the response to the call for recruits that we witness the extraordinary spectacle of the government offering to condone the offence of deserters if they will return to duty.' And on 17 April, as the country rushed toward war, the anti-war *Omaha Bee* observed, 'The government ... is embarrassed by the lack of trained sailors to man the ships. ... Desirable men, especially those of US birth or citizenship, are not numerous and are reluctant to enlist.'<sup>25</sup>

And what of the mighty US battleships? 'Nobody really knows', the *Washington Post* conceded on 31 March, 'for we have so far had no practical experience from which to form conclusions, whether the gigantic modern battle-ship is as useful as its admirers believe.' There had been no major fleet engagement between western powers since the Italians and Austrians had fought at Lissa in 1866. The intervening decades had seen the rapid development of naval technology – 'the leapfrogging race between ordnance and armor had provoked kaleidoscopic changes in hull configuration, distribution of armor, and the placement of guns', two scholars write. 'Moreover,

<sup>24</sup> *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 5 March 1898, p. 4 (ed.); *Chicago Inter Ocean*, 11 April 1898, p. 6 (ed.); *Washington Post*, 27 March 1898, section 3, p. 7; *Scientific American*, 2 April 1898, p. 16; *Chicago Tribune*, 26 Feb. 1898, p. 12 (ed.).

<sup>25</sup> *Seaboard*, 31 March 1898, p. 381; *Washington Post*, 4 April 1898, p. 6 (ed.); *Omaha Bee*, 17 April 1898, p. 12 (ed.). In 1896, 4,400 of the navy's enlisted men were foreign-born and 5,133 were native born. Charles Paullin, *Paullin's History of Naval Administration, 1775–1911* (Annapolis, 1968), p. 424. There are no statistics indicating how many of the foreign-born had been naturalised, but many observers exaggerated the number of foreign citizens aboard US warships.

the successive emergence of a series of offensive naval weapons ... made it unclear which weapon might prove decisive in combat. ... [There had been] the concomitant development of battleships, cruisers, torpedo boats, and torpedo boat destroyers. Yet without a decisive lead taken by any one technology, among all navies the fog of uncertainty continued as to the dominant weapon.<sup>26</sup>

The fog was not lifted when modern warships faced each other in the 1894–95 Sino-Japanese war. ‘These ships were weaklings compared with the terrible ships of civilized nations’, the Chicago *Times-Herald* wrote in March 1898. Furthermore, as an historian has noted, ‘as usual what happened was much less important than what some people thought had happened’. At the battle of the Yalu (the war’s major naval engagement) in September 1894, Japanese armoured cruisers had battered the Chinese fleet, including its two battleships. The following February, Japanese torpedo boats sank these two battleships in the harbour of Weihaiwei. What lessons, then, should be drawn? Was the French *Jeune Ecole* right in arguing that the battleship was too expensive and too vulnerable?<sup>27</sup> In a spirited debate on naval appropriations in the US House in April 1898, some members argued that the Sino-Japanese war had demonstrated the superiority of the battleship, while others asserted the opposite – that the battleships were ‘unwieldy craft’ and that Japan’s cruisers had ‘proved of far more destructive power’. Uncertainty was deepened by the fact that accidents aboard battleships – the downside of rapid technological change – were not uncommon; the most dramatic had occurred in June 1893, when the British battleship *Victoria* had capsized. Until, that is, the *Maine* blew up on 15 February 1898. The day after that explosion, the *Commercial Advertiser* was brutal: ‘The incident will be worth the cost of it if it teaches us humility and abates our thirst for war. If peace is so perilous to our battleships when there is real powder in their magazines, what would war be?’ The New York *Chronicle* agreed: ‘If the *Maine* blew up by accident, the same fate may befall any other of our numerous floating volcanoes [battleships]. If it was destroyed from the outside then so much the worse for the argument, because with such a thing possible in peace it may well be asked what would not be possible in

<sup>26</sup> *Washington Post*, 31 March 1898, p. 6 (ed.); David Evans and Mark Peattie, *Kaigun: Strategy, Tactics, and Technology in the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1887–1941* (Annapolis, 1997), pp. 32, 57.

<sup>27</sup> Chicago *Times-Herald*, 27 March 1898, p. 3; Ropp, *Development*, p. 295. ‘All in all’, writes an authority, the battle of the Yalu ‘suggested that in tactics, design and ordnance the battleship was developing along the right lines.’ Peter Padfield, *The Battleship Era* (London, 1972), p. 137. Here, however, we are dealing in perceptions. On the naval battles of the Sino-Japanese war, see John Perry, ‘The Battle off the Tayang, 17 September 1894’, *Mariner’s Mirror*, Nov. 1964, pp. 243–60, and John Rawlinson, *China’s Struggle for Naval Development, 1839–1895* (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 167–97.

war?’<sup>28</sup> Navy Secretary John Long confided to his diary that, ‘Our great battleships are experiments which have never yet been tried and, in the friction of a fight have almost as much to fear from some disarrangement of their own delicate machinery or some explosion of their own tremendous ammunition as from the foe.’ The Baltimore *American* noted, ‘These battleships ... can explode or sink or plunge into each other, and go to the bottom in a shorter time than any boats of any class that ever existed.’ The Chicago *Chronicle* agreed: the usefulness in war of the ‘big and costly battle-ships has never been demonstrated. ... There is much reason to doubt whether these modern battle-ships would serve us in an actual encounter.’ The San Francisco *Chronicle* scoffed at these ‘armored hotels’, and asserted, ‘we believe that when the actual trial of great battle-ships comes they will be found as deficient as were the three-deckers of the Spanish armada when they met the swift English cruisers and gunboats and were sunk and scattered.’<sup>29</sup>

The contemporary equivalent of the English cruisers and gunboats that had tormented the Spanish armada in the sixteenth century were, the *Chronicle* feared, the torpedo boats and destroyers. ‘Swift, silent’, they were ‘the cobras of the sea. ... They are the real terror of the deep, not the towering caravels, with their presence always noted and their targets always raised.’ The Baltimore *American* told its readers on 1 April of a naval exercise ‘that took place in the vicinity of Key West one night last week. The [US] torpedo boats were invited to get within striking distance of the big [US] men-of-war if they could. The huge fighting machines ... were on the alert; their powerful searchlights were turned in every direction to detect the little destroyers, and the mimic war went on for hours. What was the result? Simply that the torpedo boats got near enough without detection to blow up three of the warships had they so desired.’<sup>30</sup>

This was the United States’ Achilles’ heel, the pro-war Seattle *Post-Intelligencer* wrote less than two weeks before hostilities began: ‘We are entirely lacking in that small but terribly effective war craft, the torpedo boat destroyer.’ Spain had ‘one of the most formidable torpedo squadrons now afloat’, the *Commercial Advertiser* warned, and ‘we can be made to suffer much loss before we are in condition, successfully, to resist their attacks.’ The Chicago *Times-Herald* agreed: ‘Properly and effectively handled, they [torpedo boats] are more dreadful than the greatest battle ship ever constructed.’

<sup>28</sup> US House, 1 April 1898, *CR*, 55th Cong., 2nd sess., pp. 3462–70 (Jeremiah Simpson [Populist-KA] quoted, p. 3466); *Commercial Advertiser*, 16 Feb. 1898, p. 6 (ed.); New York *Chronicle*, 5 March 1898, p. 448. On the *Victoria*, see Padfield, *Battleship*, pp. 28–32.

<sup>29</sup> Long, *The Journal of John D. Long*, edited by Margaret Long (Rindge, NH, 1956), p. 216; Baltimore *American*, 17 Feb. 1898, p. 6 (ed.); Chicago *Chronicle*, 18 Feb. 1898, p. 6 (ed.); San Francisco *Chronicle*, 4 April 1898, p. 4 (ed.).

<sup>30</sup> San Francisco *Chronicle*, 4 April 1898, p. 4 (ed.); Baltimore *American*, 1 April 1898, p. 6 (ed.).

The San Francisco *Chronicle* told its readers (wrongly) that the battle of the Yalu had been decided by Japanese torpedo boats, the Chicago *Chronicle* bemoaned ‘the terrible destructiveness of the torpedo’, and *Scientific American* said that a torpedo flotilla ‘may easily turn the tide of battle at a critical moment.’ Torpedo boats could be ‘formidable’, the authoritative *Army and Navy Journal* stated, adding that the lack of them was ‘the weakest point in the American Navy.’ And even the Chicago *Tribune*, a jingo paper that liked to say that the United States would make short shrift of Spain, noted ‘our lamentable lack of the one type of boat that has proved itself the most formidable of all engines of war. Unfortunately this type of fighting machine known as the torpedo boat destroyer is the very one in which the Spanish navy is strongest.’<sup>31</sup>

As the United States moved toward war, many papers – outside of the growing ranks of what the Omaha *Bee* called the ‘blood-and-thunder press’ – took Spain’s naval might seriously. This included papers that had reluctantly come to the conclusion that Spain must be forced out of Cuba, by war if necessary. The Washington *Post* believed that ‘in ships and guns’ Spain’s fleet was equal to that of the USA, but that US sailors would make the difference. ‘Her navy is not so vastly inferior to ours’ and ‘we could not do it [win] without considerable loss’, the Minneapolis *Tribune* wrote. The *New York Times* admitted, ‘On paper our navy ... is not distinctly the superior of that of Spain as a fighting force, and in the department of torpedo boats of high speed is distinctly inferior to it.’ And the Navy Department’s number two, Assistant Secretary Roosevelt, who was contemptuous of all things Spanish and eager for war, wrote two weeks before hostilities began that, ‘the Spaniards have assembled a fleet of seagoing armorclads almost equal in point of strength to our own, and they have torpedo destroyers, while we have none.’<sup>32</sup>

Anti-war papers were grim. Two days after hostilities had begun, the Boston *Journal of Commerce* concluded, ‘An engagement on the ocean between the Spanish and American ships will not be likely to result in the total destruction or surrender of one side. Both fleets will suffer very serious injury.’ It might not come to a pitched battle, however: Spain’s powerful armoured cruisers were faster than the US battleships; Madrid might resort to guerrilla

<sup>31</sup> Seattle *Post-Intelligencer*, 10 April 1898, p. 23; *Commercial Advertiser*, 24 March 1898, p. 1 and 2 April, p. 3; Chicago *Times-Herald*, 1 April 1898, p. 6 (ed.); San Francisco *Chronicle*, 24 Feb. 1898, p. 6 (ed.) and 4 April, p. 4 (ed.); Chicago *Chronicle*, 28 Feb. 1898, p. 6 (ed.); *Scientific American*, 2 April 1898, p. 218; *Army and Navy Journal*, 26 March 1898, pp. 552 and 555; Chicago *Tribune*, 4 April 1898, p. 6 (ed.).

<sup>32</sup> Omaha *Bee*, 1 March 1898, p. 4 (ed.); Washington *Post*, 4 April 1898, p. 6 (ed.); Minneapolis *Tribune*, 25 Feb. 1898, p. 6 (ed.); *New York Times*, 9 April 1898, p. 6 (ed.); Roosevelt to Root, Washington DC, 5 April 1898, in Morison, *Letters*, 2: 813.

warfare at sea and ‘spin hostilities out for a long time’, the Richmond *Dispatch* wrote. *Harper’s Weekly* did not presume to guess how the naval war would be fought, but warned, ‘Spain’s formidable vessels are not only modern, but newer than most of the strong fighting craft of the United States.’ And the venerable Boston *Herald* had a nightmare vision: Spain ‘could have cruisers and privateers on the seas, and at small expense and not too much risk could cause us an immense amount of annoyance, and, directly and indirectly, do us an immense amount of damage. We should be a good deal in the position, on account of our enormous industrial interests, of a great ox attacked by a wasp. The insect could not kill the animal, but ... it could make its life intensely miserable. It is not improbable ... that the Spaniards would resort to a guerrilla warfare on sea, or guerrilla attacks upon our smaller ports, in much the same way as on land they fought the French armies in Spain ninety years ago.’ Spain might be bankrupt, but this was no guarantee that the war would be brief. ‘In the event of war the Spanish people would undoubtedly give up all they possess to sustain the government’, the Omaha *Bee* warned. ‘They have made great sacrifices and assumed enormous burdens for the sake of retaining ... their island colony’, the New York *Chronicle* wrote. ‘They are evidently prepared to make still further sacrifices.’ History demonstrated Spain’s capacity to endure. ‘Let us remember’, the Boston *Transcript* urged, that Spain – ‘poor, betrayed, destitute of ammunition, with her navy a wreck and her regular army in not much better condition than her fleet’ – had ‘faced the great Napoleon in the strength of her people, who fought with bludgeons and knives when they could find no better weapons.’ The very nature of the Spanish people – the irrationality typical of the Latin races – bode ill. Spain ‘is vindictive to the last degree’, the Richmond *Dispatch* explained. It might continue fighting even after it had been defeated by all rational standards.<sup>33</sup>

### *A Land War?*

Moreover, the Spanish army was in Cuba. Since February 1895, Madrid had sent more than 200,000 soldiers to the island. Their ranks had been piteously thinned – by disease more than by enemy fire – and estimates of the number of Spanish soldiers on the island still fit for duty ranged from a high of 100,000 to a low of 55,000. But the entire US army was only about 28,000 strong and had never fought overseas.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Boston *Journal of Commerce*, 23 April 1898, p. 54; Richmond *Dispatch*, 10 April 1898, p. 4 (ed.); *Harper’s Weekly*, 5 March 1898, p. 239; Boston *Herald*, 14 March 1898, p. 6 (ed.); Omaha *Bee*, 13 March 1898, p. 12 (ed.); New York *Chronicle*, 9 April 1898, p. 688; Boston *Transcript*, 14 April 1898, p. 4 (ed.); Richmond *Dispatch*, 21 April 1898, p. 4 (ed.).

<sup>34</sup> The exact figure was 27,532. See letter of the Army’s Adjutant-General, Apr. 7, 1898, CR, 55th Cong., 2nd sess., p. 3678. The British were probably on the mark when they estimated

‘We are told ... that the Spanish army is merely ridiculous – made up of undersized boys who know no discipline, who are poorly armed and who can’t even shoot straight’, the Chicago *Chronicle* observed. ‘But similar opinions were entertained in the south at the beginning of the civil war. It was said that the men in the union army were clodhoppers and mudsills, devoid of courage and unused to military exercises. ... It would be unpleasant to wake up to the realization ... that the Spanish soldiers could after all shoot uncomfortably straight.’<sup>35</sup>

The jingo press, on the other hand, was confident that few if any US troops would be necessary. As soon as the United States entered the war, the Chicago *Tribune* explained, it would ‘send arms, munitions, and provisions’ to the rebels. ‘Better armed and equipped, the insurgents will then move forward and assume the offensive.’ Meanwhile the US fleet would blockade Cuba. The island had been devastated, and the Spaniards were utterly dependent on food brought from Spain. Hemmed in by the insurgents reinforced by a mere handful of US soldiers, ‘the half-starved Spanish soldiers would soon ... have to surrender and scurry back to Spain’. It would be over ‘within two weeks’, the Chicago *Inter Ocean* promised.<sup>36</sup>

Anti-war papers were less sanguine. They had little confidence in the rebels. ‘The most notable military achievements of its [Cuba Libre’s] supporters have been the destruction of sugar and tobacco plantations, the desolation of the fairest of islands’, the New York *Herald* asserted. ‘The insurgent army never fights’, the Chicago *Chronicle* said. The rebels, the New York *Journal of Commerce* explained, ‘avoid all encounters’ with Spanish troops, ‘and confine their operations to the paralysis of all agricultural industry and the dynamiting of trains.’<sup>37</sup>

Even if the US navy could blockade Cuba, would the Spaniards be starved into surrender? ‘It may be usefully borne in mind’, the London *Times* warned as hostilities began, ‘that Spanish soldiers can subsist upon what seems absurdly inadequate judged by our standards ... To produce any real effect the United States must land a considerable force upon the island, and for the present the means of doing this are not obvious. ... The United States has no military organization for dealing with a war over the sea. Everything has to be improvised, and the improvisation will take time.’<sup>38</sup>

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‘the number of [Spanish] regulars now on the island’ fit for duty at about 80,000. ‘The Military Forces of Spain. Compiled in the Intelligence Division, War Office, and Corrected to April 1898’, [end April 1898], p. 18, FO 881/7016, PRO.

<sup>35</sup> Chicago *Chronicle*, 2 March 1898, p. 6 (ed.).

<sup>36</sup> Chicago *Tribune*, 25 Feb. 1898, p. 6 (ed.); Chicago *Inter Ocean*, 8 April 1898, p. 6 (ed.).

<sup>37</sup> *NYH*, 16 April 1898, p. 10 (ed.); Chicago *Chronicle*, 15 Feb. 1898, p. 6 (ed.); New York *Journal of Commerce*, 13 April 1898, p. 6 (ed.).

<sup>38</sup> London *Times*, 25 April 1898, p. 9.

‘Where is the army that is going to march through Cuba?’ the *Saturday Review* asked. ‘America has men and money; but where are the commissariat, the artillery, the transport and, above all, where are the officers? ... Congress can pass resolutions by the yard ... but resolutions will not create an army, or transport that army to Cuba across a hundred miles of sea, and land them on a mined coast patrolled by torpedo boats’. And when they had landed, the Paris *Journal des Débats* wrote, ‘they will face ... a battle-hardened army of some one hundred thousand men.’<sup>39</sup>

It would be a rude awakening, the Baltimore *American* lamented. ‘There is a certain amount of exhilaration in marching the streets behind a drum corps and a brass band, but there are not many cities to march through in Cuba, and they will not be reached until the swamps and chapparel have been crossed under a constant fire of unseen enemies.’ The New York *Herald* agreed. ‘The critical stage of the conflict can probably come only after an army of occupation has ... obtained a firm, secure foothold and base of operations on Cuban soil’. But the US troops would face two enemies – the Spanish army and yellow fever. ‘Any campaign conducted in that hot, tropical island by raw and unacclimatised troops against a large Spanish army well supplied with modern rifles must be at a great disadvantage unless the army of invasion is numerically and otherwise greatly superior’, it warned. And on 14 April it added, ‘Senator [Joseph] Foraker [R-Ohio] told the Senate yesterday that the Spanish army in Cuba has dwindled from two hundred and fifty thousand to sixty thousand. That is to say, one hundred and ninety thousand have perished in Cuba, and from what? ... From disease ... Can we expect a better fate for our ruddy, sturdy volunteers, leaving their wholesome American homes for the fever stricken shores of Cuba?’ The *Herald* believed that, ‘Thousands of our brave soldiers would fall victim to the deadly scourge of that climate’. The Chicago *Chronicle* expressed the same fear: ‘an army from the United States would hardly be better able to stand up against the Cuban climate than the Spanish army has proved to be.’ The Boston *Herald* warned, ‘To enlist the flower of our youth to go to Cuba would be to send it to destruction.’ But the plight of the US troops in Cuba would not even be ‘the most difficult question in this particular’, the *Emporia Gazette* cautioned. With an US army on the island, ‘intercommunication between the United States and Cuba would be an absolute necessity and an observance of quarantine rules an utter impossibility. The result would almost certainly be the introduction of yellow fever into the United States, its spread from port to port, and the placing in danger

<sup>39</sup> *Saturday Review*, 16 April 1898, p. 513; *Journal des Débats*, 23 April 1898, p. 2.



of more lives of our citizens than those constituting the entire population of Cuba.<sup>40</sup>

Unlike most anti-war papers, *Harper's Weekly* did not pay much attention to Cuba's dreaded diseases. Instead, it talked numbers. 'If there has to be a war, an invading army must be sent to Cuba', it stated in its 23 April issue, which appeared as hostilities began, 'and it ought to consist of at least 75,000 men. A hundred thousand men would be better. The present regular army could spare perhaps 15,000 men, and that would be the only effective force that could be sent into Cuba at the beginning of the hostilities, for at the outbreak of the war militia and volunteers would not be of great value. This would mean that the small force sent to the island, accompanied or unaccompanied by citizen soldiers, would be slaughtered.'<sup>41</sup>

US officials knew very little about the strength of the Spanish army, in Cuba and in the metropolis. The navy attaché in Madrid reported that the 'avenues of information' of the army attaché there, Major Howard Bliss, were 'exactly the same as mine' – viz., clippings from the Spanish press. In January 1898 Consul General Fitzhugh Lee wrote from Havana that Spain had only 55,000 troops fit for duty in Cuba and that they were poorly trained, badly equipped and demoralised. But General Nelson Miles, the commander of the US army, had more sober views, telling the Secretary of War on 18 April, 'In my opinion it is extremely hazardous, and I think it would be injudicious, to put an army on that island [Cuba] at this season of the year, as it would be undoubtedly decimated by the deadly disease [yellow fever], to say nothing of having to cope with 80,000 troops, the remnant of 214,000 that have become acclimated.'<sup>42</sup>

The following June, one month after a Spanish fleet had been destroyed off Manila, *Bankers' Magazine* opined, 'A large army must be gathered and trained [for the invasion of Cuba]. ... This is not the work of days or months.' The delay 'will be apt to be mistaken for weakness, and make it easier for foreign powers to bring about complications which ... will require still greater efforts on our part and greatly protract the length of the war'. In the same vein, the New York *Chronicle* warned in mid June that the destruction of Spain's Philippine fleet and the bottling up of

<sup>40</sup> Baltimore *American*, 6 April 1898, p. 6 (ed.); *NYH*: 21 April 1898, p. 12 (ed.); 13 April, p. 12 (ed.); 14 April, p. 12 (ed.); 25 March, p. 8 (ed.); Chicago *Chronicle*, 26 Feb. 1898, p. 6 (ed.); Boston *Herald*, 31 March 1898, p. 6 (ed.); Emporia *Gazette*, 31 March 1898, p. 2 (ed.).

<sup>41</sup> *Harper's Weekly*, 23 April 1898, p. 386.

<sup>42</sup> Lt. Dyer to Roosevelt, Madrid, 23 March 1898, RG 38, E 90, v. 25, NA; Lee to Day, Havana, 25 Jan. 1898, Day papers, box 35, LOC; Miles to Secretary of War, Washington DC, 13 April 1898, US War Department, US Adjutant-general's office, *Correspondence Relating to the War with Spain* (Washington DC, 1902), 1: 8.

Spain's Atlantic fleet in Santiago harbour were only 'the first and complete chapter of our Spanish war. ... If aggressive operations on a large scale are in progress in Cuba by the early autumn months, we shall be doing well.'<sup>43</sup>

*The View of the European Press*

In the winter of 1898, the Europeans turned their attention to the possibility of a Spanish-American war. The governments of continental Europe were sympathetic to Spain. This sympathy did not translate into action, however, because it was trumped by far more pressing foreign policy concerns and by the deep hostilities that divided them. Furthermore, Britain, the only power that could have spearheaded a European coalition, showed warm sympathy to the United States – in the name of Anglo-Saxon solidarity and, above all, because it sought the benefits of US friendship.<sup>44</sup>

Newspapers on the continent, like their readers, were largely pro-Spanish or at least anti-US, while the British press was very sympathetic to the United States. But the press on both sides of the Channel agreed about the costs of a possible Spanish-American war. The views of British, French and German papers were regularly reported in the US press, particularly the anti-war press, whose fears they fed.<sup>45</sup> In England, the *Westminster Gazette* wrote, 'The issue of such war would in the long run be an American victory ... But at the outset the strength of the two nations would be so balanced and the struggle in all probability so severe, and so costly, that every prudent citizen of the United States must back the President's [peace] policy.' The London *Speaker* warned that Spain 'might perhaps claim in ships a slight, though a very disputable, advantage.' The London *Engineer* concluded from its detailed comparison of the two fleets that the Americans might have to pay the price of 'their obstinate determination to arm their new vessels with guns which are the creation of their own genius.' Spain, instead, 'has wisely copied and purchased some of the best guns of all nations.' Furthermore, its

<sup>43</sup> *Bankers' Magazine*, June 1898, pp. 789, 804; *New York Chronicle*, 18 June 1898, pp. 1164–65.

<sup>44</sup> On the European powers, see Luis Álvarez Gutiérrez, 'Los imperios centrales ante el progresivo deterioro de las relaciones entre España y los Estados Unidos', *Hispania*, 57/2, no. 196 (May–Aug. 1997), pp. 435–78; Rosario de la Torre del Río, *Inglaterra y España en 1898* (Madrid, 1988), pp. 67–98; Nils Havemann, *Spanien im Kalkül der deutschen Aussenpolitik von den letzten Jahren der Ära Bismarck bis zum Beginn der Wilhelminischen Weltpolitik (1883–1899)* (Berlin, 1997), pp. 346–77; Tom Lewis, 'La politique étrangère de la France face à la guerre hispano-américaine', *Travaux de Recherches*, University of Metz, 1974, pp. 37–57.

<sup>45</sup> My conclusions are based on the British, German and French papers listed in n. 11 and on the excerpts from the European press published in the US newspapers I have read (see n. 10). The most useful secondary source is Nicole Slupetzky, 'Austria and the Spanish-American War', in Sylvia Hilton and Steve Ickringill (eds.), *European Perceptions of the Spanish-American War of 1898* (New York, 1999), pp. 181–94.

armoured cruisers were faster and more manoeuvrable than the US battleships. The *Engineer* believed that the many foreigners in the US navy ‘might be excellent material if fighting in defence of their own hearths and homes; but naval warfare of the present day ... is a grim and ghastly reality, swiftly executed, and no hirelings of an alien State are likely to come well out of such a terrible ordeal.’ Not surprisingly, it mused, ‘In point of fact, we do not believe that the Yankees thoroughly understand the spirit of mischief that they seem so determined to evoke.’ The London *Times* wrote that the United States would find the conquest of Cuba ‘a task of great difficulty’, and that the struggle would probably ‘resolve itself into a prolonged and possibly inconclusive naval guerrilla war on the part of the Spaniards, who are best in a contest of that kind.’ This was also the opinion of the noted British naval expert Fred Jane in the *Fortnightly Review*. After stressing that Spain’s fast armoured cruisers were well suited to guerrilla tactics – attacking US shipping and smaller US warships, and striking US coastal towns – Jane concluded, ‘The patriotic citizens of the United States may well come to rue the day that the meddling finger of Uncle Sam was thrust into the hornet’s nest of Cuba’. The *Saturday Review* agreed. ‘There is such a thing as getting a wolf by the ear’, it wrote one week before hostilities began, ‘and America may find before the summer is out that in starting a war of aggression on Spain she has been guilty not only of a crime against humanity, but also of a stupendous national blunder.’<sup>46</sup>

Newspapers in continental Europe drew similar conclusions. ‘No doubt Spain would, in the end, be beaten’, the *Nieuws van den Dag* of Amsterdam wrote, ‘but not until she has done as much damage as possible.’ From Paris, the *Journal des Débats* argued that ‘enormous sacrifices will be needed to bring a nation as stubborn as Spain to its knees’. ‘Uncle Sam may be a giant’, *Le Temps* said, but he would face ‘painful surprises’. The Berlin *Tageblatt* believed that ‘the American jingoes underrate the injuries that such a war will bring upon America’, and the *Kölnische Zeitung* wrote that in the initial phases of the war the Spanish would inflict ‘very severe blows’ on the US fleet. Like all the other papers, the *Neue Preussische Zeitung* believed that Spain was doomed, but that it would take time. ‘Right now, Spain is far better

<sup>46</sup> *Westminster Gazette*, 31 March 1898, p. 1; *Speaker*, 16 April 1898, p. 475; *Engineer*, 15 April 1898, p. 359; *Times*, 26 April 1898, p. 6 and 25 April, p. 9; Jane, *Fortnightly Review*, 1 April 1898, pp. 648, 649; *Saturday Review*, 16 April 1898, p. 513. Of the six British papers I have examined, the *Saturday Review* alone sympathised with Spain in her quarrel with the United States. It was also the one that came closest to discern the truth when it wrote that Spain’s vaunted armoured cruisers ‘are said to be scarcely fit to lie in the line’. But this was an aberration; in general the paper considered Spain’s armoured cruisers, torpedo boats and destroyers dangerous opponents of America’s battleships. *Saturday Review*, 16 April 1898, p. 510 quoted; see also 19 Feb. 1898, p. 243; 26 Feb., p. 283; 12 March, p. 346; 9 April, p. 480; 23 April, p. 545.

armed than the United States', it had 'superiority at sea', and 'the trade of the United States would suffer very substantial harm for a prolonged period of time at the hand of the superior power of Spain.'<sup>47</sup>

### *European Intervention?*

Americans were aware that public opinion in continental Europe was hostile to the United States. 'Every American who has kept the run of European comment upon our disagreement with Spain respecting Cuba must have been surprised as well as saddened by the unanimity with which the Continental organs of opinion favour the Spanish side', the *New York Times* wrote, while the Boston *Herald* remarked wryly that 'hostility to the United States in this exigency may be said to be the one thing on which the French and the Germans have found ground for agreement.'<sup>48</sup>

Pro-war papers were unfazed. Some simply lied. The Chicago *Tribune* told its readers that 'the leading commercial powers have become thoroughly tired of the [Cuban] war and are looking to the United States ... to bring it to a close.'<sup>49</sup> Most, however, acknowledged the Europeans' antipathy and dismissed it as irrelevant: the Europeans had other fish to fry; they would not dare lift a finger on Spain's behalf.

Anti-war papers disagreed. 'Spain finds friends in the present crisis', the San Francisco *Chronicle* warned. 'Europe might go further; [it] might intervene with arms'. That Spain was bankrupt, the New York *Chronicle* wrote, 'might prove a source of strength. Her creditors would perhaps feel forced to come to her assistance.' French citizens held the largest share of Spain's massive foreign debt, and Paris might join the war 'to save French money lenders', the *Seaboard* noted. 'If Spain and France both unite we shall find the tussle a lively and prolonged one'. Two other likely interlopers were Austria – Spain's Queen Regent was a member of the Austrian imperial family – and Germany, led by its aggressive Kaiser. Italy and Russia might also join the pack. If war came, the *Commercial Advertiser* predicted, Spain might be 'actively assisted' by several 'leading European powers', and the Chicago *Chronicle* warned that 'The sympathy of the kings, fearing a menace to their own thrones in the republican idea, may make common cause against the conqueror from the new world'. The *Emporia Gazette* feared that a

<sup>47</sup> *Nieuws van den Dag* (Amsterdam), quoted by *Literary Digest*, 26 March 1898, p. 383; *Journal des Débats* (Paris), 9 March 1898, p. 2; *Le Temps* (Paris), 11 April 1898, p. 1 and 7 April, p. 1; *Tageblatt*, quoted by *New York Times*, 29 March 1898, p. 5; *Kölnische Zeitung*, 16 April 1898 (evening edition), p. 2; *Neue Preussische Zeitung*: 6 April 1898, p. 1; 27 April, p. 1; 30 March, p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> *New York Times*, 22 March 1898, p. 6 (ed.); Boston *Herald*, 18 April 1898, p. 6 (ed.).

<sup>49</sup> Chicago *Tribune*, 19 Jan. 1898, p. 6 (ed.).

conflict between Spain and the USA might precipitate a larger war in which France and Russia would end up on Spain's side versus the United States with Britain on its side. The New York *Journal of Commerce* cautioned, 'It would be madness to intervene in Cuba unless we were prepared for such outside resistance as our actions might well be expected to provoke.'<sup>50</sup>

By late March the evident unwillingness of the continental European powers to get involved, and the equally clear indications of British sympathy for the United States, had largely dissipated these fears. Even the Spanish press acknowledged that Spain was alone. 'Without doubt the United States has skilfully chosen the right moment to satisfy its ambitions', a Madrid daily noted. 'The great powers are preoccupied with matters that affect them directly, like that of the Far East, and they cannot give their attention to other issues'. But among antiwar papers in the United States uncertainty lingered. If the war was short European intervention was unlikely, the New York *Herald* wrote on 2 April. But what if Spain put up a good fight? 'A blunder or a repulse would show what the great Powers thought of our war. Monroe doctrine and other diplomatic cobwebberies would vanish.' The Baltimore *American* expressed similar fears two weeks later: 'if Spain ... should win the first battles, the results would inevitably be to gain for her aid abroad, and this country, great as it is, cannot fight the world.' The Boston *Transcript* told its readers on 9 April that one reason the United States must not make war on Spain was the danger that, 'We shall be many times brought to the edge of hostilities with European nations, especially with France and Germany, whose navies are stronger than ours, and who will be inclined to side with Spain in order to cripple American manufactures and commerce'. And as late as 25 April, when the war had already begun, the New York *Journal of Commerce* warned, 'We have nothing to hope for but possibly still something to fear from France, Russia and Germany.'<sup>51</sup>

### *The Economic Cost*

Given its assessment of Spain's ability to resist, the anti-war press was bound to fear that the conflict would prove extremely expensive and threaten the gold standard. The New York *Herald* wrote that it would cost the United

<sup>50</sup> San Francisco *Chronicle*, 16 March 1898, p. 6 (ed.); New York *Chronicle*, 12 Feb. 1898, p. 308; *Seaboard*, 17 March 1898, p. 348; *Commercial Advertiser*, 25 Feb. 1898, p. 1; Chicago *Chronicle*, 26 Feb. 1898, p. 6 (ed.); *Emporia Gazette*, 25 Feb. 1898, p. 2 (ed.); New York *Journal of Commerce*, 28 Feb. 1898, p. 6 (ed.).

<sup>51</sup> *Época*, 3 April 1898, p. 1; *NYH*, 2 April 1898, p. 12 (ed.); Baltimore *American*, 17 April 1898, p. 6 (ed.); Boston *Transcript*, 9 April 1898, p. 4 (ed.); New York *Journal of Commerce*, 25 April 1898, p. 6 (ed.). The San Francisco *Chronicle* concluded only on 14 April that 'There is no reason to think that Spain can get allies', p. 6 (ed.) and the Chicago *Times-Herald* reached the same conclusion only on 17 April, p. 6 (ed.).

States at least \$500 million for the first six months. The desire to protect the \$50 million invested in the island paled in comparison. Such a costly war would precipitate inflation. ‘Remember, too, that as our currency is now, if we lose our hold on gold, the alternative is silver’, the *New York Chronicle* warned. The *United States Investor* agreed. War with Spain would lead to ‘a complete disorganization of our finances’. *Bankers’ Magazine* explained why: ‘If war is actually declared, to be effective on the part of the United States it must be an offensive war carried on either in Spain or Cuba. Such a war involves ... an immense amount of material and transport ships. The expense will be as much greater than that of the Civil War as the expense of the Civil War was greater than that of the war of 1812.’ Therefore, the magazine asked, ‘Under our present monetary laws, how long would it be possible to maintain the gold standard?’<sup>52</sup>

Taking the analysis one step further, the *New York Chronicle* warned that ‘A good many’ of those who championed the Cuban cause ‘do not at all care for Cuba; they are only interested in the establishment of a free-silver standard.’ The *Chicago Times-Herald* noted: ‘The jingoes ... have been actuated principally by a belief that war with Spain would force the country to a silver basis’. And the *New York Tribune* asserted, ‘The most impatient patriots and the noisiest advocates of immediate unconditional and uncompromising war are the persons who for the last two or three years have been in pretty much the same eager, violent and bloodthirsty state of mind over the financial question and the unwillingness of the cowardly and unpatriotic Money Power to agree to the free coinage of silver. ... [War with Spain] would inevitably increase the national debt, force the issue of new financial obligations, unsettle values, derange the currency and bring the country nearer to free-silver coinage and consequent repudiation.’ The *New York Journal of Commerce* had argued as early as May 1897 that ‘there is a large streak of silver running through these ardent champions of human liberty. [They] desire to force bankruptcy on the country as a means of breaking down the gold standard’, and it concluded grimly a year later, a few days after hostilities had begun, ‘The Populists and the Bryanites, in Congress, will make every effort to assist Spain by breaking down the credit of the United States, increasing its expenditure, depreciating its currency ... These men purpose to issue silver dollars and fiat money to meet the expenses of the war ... We have the Spaniards to fight in the front, and we have their most serviceable allies – the cheap money men – to fight in the rear.’<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> *NYH*, 27 Feb. 1898, Section 5, p. 3; *New York Chronicle*, 6 Nov. 1897, p. 845; *United States Investor*, 2 April 1898, p. 497; *Bankers’ Magazine*, April 1898, p. 511 and March, p. 348.

<sup>53</sup> *New York Chronicle*, 12 Feb. 1898, p. 308; *Chicago Times-Herald*, 11 Feb. 1898, p. 6 (ed.); *New York Tribune*, 1 April 1898, p. 6 (ed.); *New York Journal of Commerce*, 21 May 1897, p. 4 (ed.) and 25 April 1898, p. 6 (ed.).

While jingo papers emphasised what the Cuban insurrection was costing the United States, the anti-war press emphasised that war with Spain would cripple the economic recovery. *Bankers' Magazine* explained, 'Heavy as has been the loss inflicted upon the commerce of the United States by the long-continued Cuban insurrection ... a war between Spain and the United States would incalculably increase the loss to business interests.' The *Boston Transcript* warned, 'We shall suffer enormous losses of life and money', and the *New York Chronicle* said, 'we are very vulnerable. We have a long seacoast to protect and a large foreign trade to defend. As a mere question of business therefore, although it is unfortunate to have our Cuban trade interfered with, it will be a more serious matter still to have our coast line at all points subject to attack and our foreign commerce everywhere at risk.' The *New York Journal of Commerce* stressed, 'The existing and prospective damage to the trade of our seventy millions of people infinitely exceeds any possible advantage to the international status or the home trade of the country that might accrue from a successful war with Spain'. According to the *New York Herald*, 'war ... would put the country back at least twenty years'. The *San Francisco Chronicle* concluded, 'America sympathises with Cuba, but that is not a good reason why our merchant fleet should be ruined. Nor is it one why a new pension list should be created, why war taxes should be imposed, why towns should be laid waste, why another billion should be added to the national debt, why thousands of useful lives should be cut short, why the apprehension of Europe about the rising power of the United States should be increased.'<sup>54</sup>

### *The Lack of Spoils*

The anti-war press believed that victory over Spain would not only be extremely costly but also pointless. Cuba would fall under US control, but the United States would soon rue Spain's departure. Race was the reason. Here, too, the contrast with those who wanted war is striking.

The proponents of war largely avoided references to the racial make-up of the Cuban population, and, when they did refer to it, it was in soothing tones. (This sleight of hand was made easier by the fact that – unlike the upper echelons of the rebel army – the entire rebel leadership in the United States and the provisional civil government in Cuba were white.) 'Natives of the island with Negro or Indian blood in their veins exist in comparatively small numbers', the *Atlanta Constitution* wrote, and 'the members of the cabinet [of the rebel government] are ... very competent and intelligent men,

<sup>54</sup> *Bankers' Magazine*, March 1898, p. 358; *Boston Transcript*, 9 April 1898, p. 4 (ed.); *New York Chronicle*, 12 Feb. 1898, p. 308; *New York Journal of Commerce*, 5 March 1898, p. 6 (ed.); *NYH*, 22 Feb. 1898, p. 10 (ed.); *San Francisco Chronicle*, 15 March 1898, p. 6 (ed.).

belonging to some of the best families of Cuba.’ The senior rebel representative in the United States proclaimed that ‘None of the members of the constituent assembly or of the government are of the colored race.’ Widely read pro-rebel books either overlooked the colour issue or stressed that blacks in the rebel army were in subordinate positions and that the men in charge were upper class whites, some of them ‘of blonde, Saxon type’, who admired the United States. Pro-war newspapers published poignant drawings of Cubans dying of starvation – women, old men and children: they did not have Negroid features. Other drawings portrayed Cuba as a young white woman tormented by a brutish Spaniard and seeking Uncle Sam’s help. The Chicago *Inter Ocean* portrayed Cuba as a man – a proud guerrilla fighter or helpless victim of the Spanish fiend; the man was Hispanic, without any trace of African features.<sup>55</sup>

Anti-war papers, on the other hand, were keen to remind their readers that the Cubans were ‘more than half negroes, many of whom were born in Africa, and the remainder turbulent Spaniards and descendants of Spaniards’. The San Francisco *Chronicle* said that the rebels were ‘negroes and half-breeds’; the Chicago *Times-Herald* wrote that they were ‘a triple mixture of Spanish, negro and Indian blood’; Harper’s *Weekly* warned that ‘negroes and mulattoes’ made up ‘a large part’ of the rebel rank and file, and ‘men of color’ held ‘high places of command’ in the rebel army.<sup>56</sup>

The anti-war press argued that it was therefore best that Cuba remain under Spanish rule. ‘Cuba libre means another Black Republic’, the *New York Herald* asserted. ‘We don’t want one so near. Hayti is already too close.’

<sup>55</sup> Quotations from *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 April 1898, p. 4 (ed.) and 18 April, p. 4 (ed.); Tomás Estrada Palma, quoted by Senator Jacob Gallinger (R-NH), 16 April 1898, *CR*, 55th Cong., 2nd sess., p. 3974; Grover Flint, *Marching with Gomez: A War Correspondent’s Field Note-Book Kept During Four Months with the Cuban Army*, Boston, 1898, p. 52. See also *New York Journal*: 14 March 1898, pp. 4–5; 15 March, pp. 4–5; 21 March, p. 3; 24 March, p. 3; *Topeka State Journal*: 7 Feb. 1898, p. 2; 5 March, p. 5; 10, 17, 18, 21 March (all p. 1); *San Francisco Call*, 27 Feb. 1898, p. 18; *Chicago Chronicle*, 23 March 1898, p. 4 and 26 March, p. 3; *Chicago Tribune*, 21 March 1898, p. 3 and 2 April, p. 9; *Chicago Journal*: 21 Jan. 1898, p. 1; 7 March, p. 1; 10 March, p. 2; 12, 17, 18, 24 March (all p. 1); *New Orleans Times-Democrat*: 24, 28 March and 6 April 1898 (all p. 1); *Chicago Inter Ocean*: 19 Feb.; 12, 25, 31 March; 13 April 1898 (all p. 1); Stephen Bonsal, *The Real Condition of Cuba To-Day* (New York, 1897); Richard Harding Davis, *Cuba in War Time*, [1898] (Lincoln, NE, 2000). For a rare exception – a pro-war congressman who said that ‘the Cuban armies are composed of about 80 per cent negroes and mulattoes’, and felt no need to soften the blow by claiming, for example, that the leaders were white – see William King (D-UTAH), 30 Jan. 1898, *CR*, 55th Cong., 2nd sess., Appendix, pp. 233–49. The best study on race and the Cuban war of independence is Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality* (Chapel Hill, 1995). See also Michael Hunt’s seminal *Ideology and US Foreign Policy* (New Haven, 1987), pp. 58–68.

<sup>56</sup> *Chicago Chronicle*, 4 Feb. 1898, p. 6 (ed.); *San Francisco Chronicle*, 12 April 1898, p. 6 (ed.); *Chicago Times-Herald*, 12 April 1898, p. 6; *Harper’s Weekly*, 26 March 1898, p. 291.



Annexation, however, would add to the Union ‘new Congo-creole constituencies, over whose electoral enlightenment we may rejoice as we do over the Red River parishes of Louisiana or the Sea Islands of South Carolina’. (African Americans had not yet been fully disenfranchised in the South.) An independent Cuba ‘would gradually descend to the condition of a second Haiti’, the Boston *Herald* echoed, but to annex it would place ‘a terrible burden’ on the US people. The Chicago *Chronicle* was categorical: ‘our vociferous and obstreperous Cuban sympathisers are annexationists almost to a man. Their sympathy is that of a hungry man for a beefsteak or of the highwayman for his victim’. Cuba, however, ‘is not fitted to become an integral part of the union.’ Annexation would bring ‘a fierce, tricky, ignorant, brutal, demoralised community’ into the Union, the Boston *Transcript* agreed. ‘It would be like the annexation of a house infected with an inexterminable contagious disease’, the prominent liberal Carl Schurz asserted in *Harper’s Weekly*.<sup>57</sup>

War would be ‘pure waste and folly’, the *Commercial Advertiser* concluded. It was not just that the United States did not want Cuba: as far as the public debate is concerned, it did not want any Spanish colony, not even the Philippines – not the archipelago, not any island, not even a naval base. As debate raged over the costs and benefits of going to war with Spain, the Philippines were mentioned, occasionally, as a strategic liability for Madrid – not as a boon for the United States. Should hostilities begin, the islands would be, the *New York Times* noted, ‘an easy and tempting’ target for a US attack or a welcome opportunity for Japan, which coveted them. With only two fleeting exceptions – a solitary remark in the anti-war *New York Herald*: ‘The Philippines would give us a potent voice in that mighty drama of the East now pressing to a consummation’, and an equally solitary remark in the pro-war *New York Journal*: ‘we should reimburse ourselves’ for the cost of the war by forcing Spain to surrender the Philippines and the Caroline Islands and selling them to other nations ‘whose mouths have long been watering after those bits of land’ – no one in the press, in Congress, or in the White House, even hinted before the outbreak of the war that the United States should acquire any part of the Philippines. The claim that the archipelago would be a vital stepping-stone toward asserting US rights in the fabled China market arose only after Dewey had destroyed Spain’s Asiatic squadron at Manila Bay. Until then, the many US citizens who dreamt of the China market longed for a canal across Central

<sup>57</sup> *NYH*, Jan. 21 1898, p. 8 (ed.) and Apr. 20, p. 12 (ed.); *Boston Herald*, Jan. 22, 1898, p. 6 (ed.) and Apr. 10, p. 12 (ed.); *Chicago Chronicle*, Feb. 26, 1898, p. 6 (ed.) and Feb. 13, p. 8 (ed.); *Boston Transcript*, 9 April 1898, p. 4 (ed.); [Carl Schurz,] *Harper’s Weekly*, 23 April 1898, p. 387.

America, the annexation of Hawaii, and a stronger fleet – not the Philippines.<sup>58</sup>

Therefore, there were no spoils. As the conflict entered its second week *Harper's Weekly* pronounced, 'If ever a war promised nothing but loss to the country that began it, it is this which the United States has begun against Spain – in which we have everything to lose and nothing whatever to gain – and this is true, no matter what may be the result of the conflict.'<sup>59</sup>

These, then, were the practical reasons influential newspapers opposed war. The anti-war position was a balance sheet on which the costs – in money and US lives – greatly outweighed the benefits. Did this very practical approach represent the views of a majority of the business community, as Julius Pratt argued sixty-five years ago?

The newspapers I read tend to support Pratt's conclusions. The *New York Journal of Commerce* wrote on 5 March 1898: 'The antiwar class comprises those who are engaged in the creation and distribution of the national wealth – the industrialist, the merchant, the railroad investor and we ought to be able to say the working masses, and could, had not their passions been swayed by the sensational press. The interests on whom the country is dependent for its daily bread, for prosperity and progress, and for a plethoric condition of bank accounts are almost unanimously against war or a policy towards Spain that might drift into that catastrophe.' Wary historians may want to dismiss these words because the *Journal* was outspoken in its opposition to war, but much the same was said by *Bradstreet's*, which had been studiously silent in the debate. 'It is well known', it wrote on 23 April, 'that the representatives of the business interests of the country, mindful of the

<sup>58</sup> *Commercial Advertiser*, 28 March 1898, p. 6 (ed.); *New York Times*, 16 March 1898, p. 6 (ed.); *NYH*, 2 April 1898, p. 8 (ed.); *New York Journal*, Apr. 11 1898, p. 6 (ed.). What I say in the text is based on the 41 US papers I have read (see n. 10) and on the *Congressional Record*. I am not aware of any public statement made before the outbreak of the war by members of the McKinley administration (including Roosevelt), senior military officers (including Mahan), or political figures outside of the government advocating the acquisition of any part of the Philippines, not even a naval base. As for what went on behind the scenes – a controversial issue – I have found no evidence of any such desire in the papers of McKinley and other officials I have examined (see n. 5) And while I have not studied the papers of Theodore Roosevelt, Henry Cabot Lodge, Alfred Mahan and other proponents of a 'large policy,' and cannot, therefore, speak with authority, I have seen no convincing evidence in the secondary literature that they harboured any desire for the Philippines before the war. (The war plans of the US Naval War College, beginning with the 'War with Spain' drafted in June 1896 by Lt. William Kimball – which contemplated an attack on the Philippines – were just that, war plans, not statements of political designs. The same stricture applies to Roosevelt's 25 Feb. 1898 orders to Dewey.) For the historiographical debate, see Ephraim Smith, 'William McKinley's Enduring Legacy: The Historiographical Debate on the Taking of the Philippine Islands,' in James Bradford (ed.), *Crucible of Empire: The Spanish-American War and Its Aftermath* (Annapolis, 1993), pp. 205–49.

<sup>59</sup> *Harper's Weekly*, 30 April 1898, p. 411.

havoc and destruction and economic derangement which follow in the wake of war, have earnestly hoped for an adjustment of the difficulty which would be compatible with the maintenance of peace.’ And the London *Times* noted on 7 April that in his desire to avoid war McKinley ‘is supported by all the great financial and commercial interests in the United States.’<sup>60</sup>

These assertions are indirectly confirmed by pro-war papers. In the wake of the *Maine*, the New York *Journal* lashed out at ‘the eminently respectable porcine citizens who wallow for dollars in the money-grubbing sty ... and consider the starvation of half a million inoffensive men, women and children, the murder of two hundred and fifty American sailors and the dishonour of the American flag of less importance than a fall of two points in the price of stock’. A cartoon in the Chicago *Journal* portrayed the president holding a scale: one end held the corpse of a victim of the *Maine*; the other, the heavier weight of a sack of dollars. The Atlanta *Constitution* asserted, ‘It is the moneyed element to which McKinley is catering’. The New Orleans *Times-Democrat* wondered whether McKinley’s failure to act was due to ‘his characteristic invertebrateness or [to] the restraints of the peace-at-any price moneyed interests or business interests of the country’. The Chicago *Chronicle* cried out, ‘The Rothschilds and the Morgans control the White House’. The Omaha *World-Herald* inveighed against ‘the wretched spirit of commercialism’ that opposed war on Spain. A cartoon in the Chicago *Inter Ocean* portrayed a cart (‘business interests’) on which a fat businessman sat, and a beautiful horse (‘national honor’) draped in the US flag – the cart stood in front and the horse was tied behind, unable to move. And the Chicago *Tribune* depicted Minerva, sword in one hand and US flag in the other, saying, ‘Let the men whose loyalty is to the dollar stand aside while the men whose loyalty is to the flag come to the front.’<sup>61</sup>

### *The Shift*

The explosion of the *Maine* hardened US public opinion against Spain and swelled the ranks of the pro-war press. This much is generally agreed. There is less agreement, however, about exactly why. To understand why some of

<sup>60</sup> New York *Journal of Commerce*, 5 March 1898, p. 6 (ed.); *Bradstreet's*, 23 April 1898, p. 257; London *Times*, 2 April 1898, p. 11. On 29 March, the *Wall Street Journal*, which had not taken a strong editorial position against the war, wrote that ‘conservative men in both countries [United States and Spain] will welcome any steps which will relieve the Cuban difficulty, yet maintain peace.’ 29 March 1898, p. 2 (ed.).

<sup>61</sup> New York *Journal*, 24 Feb. 1898, p. 6 (ed.); Chicago *Journal*, 28 Feb. 1898, p. 1; Atlanta *Constitution*, 14 Feb. 1898, p. 2; New Orleans *Times-Democrat*, 9 March 1898, p. 4 (ed.); Chicago *Chronicle*, 14 April 1898, p. 6 (ed.); Omaha *World-Herald*, 17 April 1898, p. 4 (ed.); Chicago *Inter Ocean*, 22 Feb. 1898, p. 1; Chicago *Tribune*, 26 March 1898, p. 3.

the staunchest anti-war papers changed their position, I examined the twelve papers in my sample that shifted from an anti-war to a pro-war stance after the *Maine*. Seven of these twelve appear to have made the change for a variety of reasons – the growing awareness that Spain was alone, fear that continuing uncertainty would depress business, suspicion that Spain might indeed be responsible for the *Maine*, and the pressure of public opinion. The remaining five, however, appears to have been swayed by one reason above all – domestic politics.

I focus on these five papers: the Chicago *Times-Herald*, the *New York Times*, the *New York Herald*, the *Commercial Advertiser*, and the *Chicago Chronicle*. They were among the most important newspapers of the country; with the exception of the *Chicago Chronicle*, they supported the administration and explained in a straightforward manner why they changed their stance.

The independent Chicago *Times-Herald*, which was owned by McKinley's close friend H. H. Kohlsaat, had consistently praised the president's peace policy, but suddenly, on 4 March, it changed: 'Intervention in Cuba, peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must, is immediately inevitable ... Let President McKinley hesitate to rise to the just expectation of the US people in regard to Cuba, and who dare doubt that "war for Cuban liberty" will be the crown of thorns the free silver democrats and populists will adopt at the elections this fall? And who can doubt that by that sign, held aloft and proclaimed by such magnetic orators as William J. Bryan, they will sweep this country like a cyclone?' The *Times-Herald* was blunt: McKinley's peace policy would lead to the victory of the Bryan wing of the Democratic party in the November congressional elections. 'Between war and free silver, The Times-Herald is for war.' Spain would 'inflict much damage' and the war would cost the United States an 'enormous sum' of money, but there was no alternative.<sup>62</sup>

The *New York Times* said much the same thing. 'It is not what Spain has done, but what she has not done that constitutes our grievance', it explained in a 15 March editorial. Spain's failure 'to suppress the insurgents in Cuba', her savage repression, 'and the natural and inevitable sympathy of our people with the Cubans ... give rise to excitement and disturbance here. ... This unrest among our people is not a subject either of approval or of censure by the Government. It is a political fact of which it is bound to take notice if it becomes sufficiently grave.' The *New York Times*, which had opposed the drift to war, was changing its tune. 'If intervention is not made an accomplished fact,' it said three weeks later, 'the Congressional elections next Fall will turn on that issue. Beyond all doubt

<sup>62</sup> Chicago *Times-Herald*: 4 March 1898, p. 6 (ed.); 7 March, p. 6 (ed.); 4 April, p. 6 (ed.); 17 April, p. 6 (ed.).

a “war Congress” would be elected’.<sup>63</sup> And a ‘war Congress’ would be Democratic.

Even the New York *Herald*, which had been in the foremost ranks of the anti-war forces, back-pedalled. ‘With public sentiment inflamed over the Maine report, with Congress breaking out in open revolt’ against McKinley’s peace policy, ‘conditions are as ugly as they well could be’, it noted on 30 March. Two days later the *Herald*, which had categorically opposed the independence of Cuba, reversed itself: ‘There can be no peace without the independence of Cuba’, it asserted. If Spain refused, ‘well, war be it then.’ The *Herald* was surrendering to a current that was too strong to resist, but it did so very reluctantly. ‘We do not welcome this war’, it stated on 6 April. Victory over Spain would be ‘only a barren conquest’. On 20 April, when war was but a few hours distant, the *Herald* concluded: ‘War is assured and it will be a grave business. We are greater than Spain. In the way of bigness there is no comparison. So was the Union stronger than the Confederacy. We outnumbered the South in armies and in navies. She was without resources or credit. As a belligerent she was alone. Yet the victory was a four years’ undertaking, the loss of life and treasure without precedent, and an annual debt still growing. If four years were required to solve the problem of the Confederacy, how can we hope in a fortnight to solve the problem of Spain? Nor should we cherish the belief that we are alone with Spain – that Spain has no friends.’<sup>64</sup>

The *Commercial Advertiser* also joined the pro-war ranks – but oh so reluctantly. It accepted war not because it was just or in the interest of the United States, but because ‘the stimulus of public opinion and the steady pressure of Congress’ left no realistic alternative and continuing resistance would lead to the victory of the silver forces in November.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>63</sup> *New York Times*, 15 March 1898, p. 6 (ed.) and 5 April, p. 6 (ed.).

<sup>64</sup> *NYH*: 30 March 1898, p. 5; 2 April, p. 8 (ed.); 6 April, p. 8 (ed.); 14 April, p. 12 (ed.); 20 April, p. 12 (ed.).

<sup>65</sup> *Commercial Advertiser*, 31 March 1898, p. 6 (ed.) quoted; the paper’s editorial line was consistently averse to the war. On 15 March, for example: ‘the cost of war would exceed any possible gain.’ On 17 March: ‘The business interests that war would harm are not the peculiar province of Wall Street, but include all the trade and industry of the country down to the smallest shopkeeper and humblest laborer.’ On 25 March: ‘It is highly probable that war with Spain would drive American commerce from the seas while it lasted or inflict immense losses on American shipowners and insurance companies ... It would be worse than the civil war ... We suffered enormously then, though we were able to protect our coasting trade much better than we could against Spain.’ On 28 March: ‘The war would be so costly and profitless all around that it seems incredible that it should come. It would be pure waste and folly.’ And on 30 March: war ‘will increase expenditures enormously ... Foreign trade will be interrupted and customhouse receipts will decline. ... We should probably need \$500,000,000 for the first year of war’. True, it muted its criticism during the remaining three weeks, but as late as 20 April, it wrote: ‘We are not very well prepared for war ... It seems incredible that a war so hopeless and ruinous to one

The anomalous case of the Chicago *Chronicle*, the most important Democratic daily of the Midwest, is noteworthy. Through February, it had harshly criticised the administration for its failure to come to the aid of the Cuban rebels. ‘There is no dignity nor manhood, no vigour, no success in McKinley’s foreign policy.’<sup>66</sup>

Nevertheless, the *Chronicle* opposed war. It considered Spain a formidable foe. It distrusted the battleships, feared the Spanish torpedoes, believed that the Spaniards would fight with courage and determination, and worried about intervention by European powers.<sup>67</sup> It ridiculed McKinley, ‘pulled one way [by the jingo wing of the Republican party] and hauled another [by big business which opposed war], kicked backward and forward like a football between opposite sides’. But the *Chronicle* could not fault his policy. ‘His course, on the whole, regarding Cuba is to be approved.’<sup>68</sup> It was a most uncomfortable position for a rabid Democratic paper, and it was out of step with a majority of the Democratic Party.

Even in the wake of the explosion of the *Maine*, the *Chronicle* maintained its anti-war stance, praising Spanish efforts to assist the ship’s survivors and suggesting that the rebels had been responsible for the disaster. And it urged caution. ‘When the spirit of warfare is aroused and the fighting blood is up there is no telling how many troops may be thrown into the conflict nor how long the war may last ... In the end it is entirely probable that the American would win, but he would win at great cost, both of men and money.’<sup>69</sup>

And then, abruptly, the *Chronicle*’s position changed. ‘War would for a time upset the fetish worship of the dollar’, it announced in a 1 March editorial. ‘It would evoke in the souls of millions a sentiment nobler than the everlasting and ever-present yearning for money. ... We can stand war better than we can submit to a cowardly, dishonourable peace. Bloodletting clears the head – and sometimes the conscience.’ Two days later it declared that Spain was responsible for the *Maine*. Henceforth, day after day, it demanded war ‘to avenge the seamen done to death in the harbor of Havana’.<sup>70</sup>

The editors of the *Chronicle* never explained why they had suddenly decided that Spain was guilty, but it is difficult to resist the conclusion that partisan considerations were also behind the volte-face. By March the US people, as the *Chronicle* readily acknowledged, wanted war and they would punish those who demurred with ‘political annihilation’ at the polls. ‘There

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combatant [Spain], so profitless to the other and so costly and barren to civilisation should not be prevented by a combined effort.’ *Commercial Advertiser*, all eds., all p. 6.

<sup>66</sup> Chicago *Chronicle*, 15 Feb. 1898, p. 6 (ed.).

<sup>67</sup> See above.

<sup>68</sup> Chicago *Chronicle*, 26 Jan. 1898, p. 6 (ed.).

<sup>69</sup> Chicago *Chronicle*, 26 Feb. 1898, p. 6 quoted (ed.), and 18 Feb., p. 6 (ed.) on the rebels’ responsibility for the *Maine*.

<sup>70</sup> Chicago *Chronicle*, 1 March 1898, p. 6 (ed.) and 8 April, p. 6 (ed.).

is a storm coming, and the Republican Party is going to be right in the middle of it', the *Chronicle* predicted. 'Along [sic] in next November the rainy season will begin and its first effect will be to wash away the Republican majority in the House of Representatives. The storm will continue and in 1900 it will culminate in a cloudburst which will sweep from power forever the tricky and truckling Republican party.'<sup>71</sup>

Henceforth the *Chronicle* was firmly in the growing phalanx of pro-war papers. Initially it continued to caution that victory, while certain, would be 'a serious and protracted affair', but these warnings soon evaporated. And while the paper could not bring itself to speak warmly of the Cuban rebels or of the Cuban people, at least it no longer called them a 'turbulent, half savage riffraff' and references to their race disappeared.<sup>72</sup>

The business community also began softening its opposition to the war in March, but because of the fragmented nature of the evidence, it is difficult to assess how significant that shift was. Furthermore, newspapers occasionally made statements that contradicted their otherwise consistent editorial lines. For example, a 14 March editorial could be cited as evidence that the influential New York *Journal of Commerce* had abandoned its anti-war stance, but if one reads the paper day after day through the next five weeks – until the outbreak of the war – it becomes very clear that that editorial was an aberration and that the *Journal of Commerce* remained, infact, staunchly anti-war.<sup>73</sup>

The same danger lurks in the analysis of the views of the chambers of commerce. Should we give more weight to the widely reported fact that the Cincinnati and Pittsburgh chambers came out in favour of war, or to a 7 April editorial of the New York *Journal of Commerce* that listed a string of other chambers that had approved resolutions 'strongly urging further efforts to maintain peace'?<sup>74</sup>

My own sample of the US business press indicates that the much-touted shift of business toward war after the *Maine* was modest. Of the eleven business papers I read, two – the *Wall Street Journal* and *Dun's Review* – were

<sup>71</sup> Chicago *Chronicle*, 9 March 1898, p. 6 (ed.) and 5 March, p. 6 (ed.).

<sup>72</sup> Chicago *Chronicle*, 9 March 1898, p. 6 (ed.) and 4 Feb., p. 6 (ed.). For earlier racist references to the Cubans, see *ibid.*, 12 Feb. 1898, p. 6 (ed.) and 13 Feb., p. 8 (ed.).

<sup>73</sup> For an example of overreliance of the 14 March 1898, p. 6 editorial, see LaFeber, *New Empire*, p. 392. For the next five weeks, the *Journal of Commerce* continued to call the rebels thugs and terrorists. It continued to warn that European nations might intervene on Spain's behalf if war broke out. It continued to claim that the country was being 'pushed into war' by irresponsible elements – among them 'the most active opponents of sound finance', whose purpose was 'to issue silver dollars and fiat money to meet the expenses of the war.' (Quotations from eds. of 7 and 25 April, both p. 6. See also eds. of: 23 and 31 March; 8, 9, and 13 [two] April, all p. 6.)

<sup>74</sup> New York *Journal of Commerce*, 7 April 1898, p. 6 (ed.).

consistently lukewarm in their opposition to war; another, *Bradstreet's*, expressed no opinion. Of the remaining eight, the Seaboard joined the pro-war ranks in March, as did, with extreme reluctance, the *Commercial Advertiser*. The other six business papers remained steadfast and vocal in their opposition to war.

The explosion of the *Maine* also affected McKinley's policy. Between 27 March and 10 April the United States presented Spain with a series of demands that amounted to an ultimatum: Spain must conclude an armistice with the rebels at once and enter into negotiations with them 'through friendly offices of President United States.' The US minister in Madrid, Stewart Woodford, was instructed to obtain the pledge that, 'if terms of peace not satisfactorily settled by Oct. first, President of the United States to be final arbiter between Spain and insurgents'. But more important than the specific demands was the subtext. In his despatches to Woodford, Assistant Secretary of State William Day made it clear that McKinley was under intense congressional pressure, that Congress would vote for armed intervention in Cuba if a satisfactory settlement was not reached promptly, and that only a settlement that gave the Cubans independence would satisfy Congress. Short of a humiliating Spanish surrender, war was inevitable. On 10 April the flurry of negotiations ended as it became clear that Spain would not abandon the island.<sup>75</sup> The next day McKinley sent his long-awaited message to Congress, announcing that his efforts to reach a peaceful settlement with Madrid had failed, 'leaving the question', as a close aide noted, 'in the hands of Congress.'<sup>76</sup> As expected, Congress chose war.

Because the record is so opaque, McKinley's policy toward Spain remains subject to conflicting explanations.<sup>77</sup> The evidence suggests that he initially believed that if Spain granted considerable autonomy to Cuba it might be able to restore order. He also realised that Spain's failure to defuse the rebellion in a timely manner could precipitate a Spanish-American war – an outcome he very much hoped to avoid. By early February 1898 – before the *Maine* exploded – McKinley had grown increasingly pessimistic about Madrid's ability to resolve the crisis and was dismayed by the suffering of the island's population. It is quite possible that in 1898 McKinley would have chosen war even if the *Maine* had never entered Havana harbour. On the other hand, worries about the cost of war in money and in US lives and the cautions of the business community might have restrained him. Both interpretations are

<sup>75</sup> Day to Woodford, 27 March 1898 (quoted); Woodford to Day, 28 March; Day to Woodford, 29 March; Day to Woodford, 30 March. For the 10 April meeting that signalled the end of the diplomatic efforts, see Day, 'Interview with Spanish Minister,' and enclosed memorandum. All in Day papers, box 35, LOC.

<sup>76</sup> George B. Cortelyou, Diary, entry of 9 April 1898, Cortelyou papers, box 52, LOC.

<sup>77</sup> See the sources listed in n. 1.



plausible because the evidence is so slight. Perhaps much would have hinged on McKinley's assessment of Spain's ability to defend itself and inflict pain on the United States – and this assessment we do not know.

What is certain, however, is that by late March, had McKinley resisted war, he would have risked a revolt within his own party and opened the door to a Democratic victory in the fall. Since the Democrats in Congress were by then solidly arrayed in favour of war – and many Republicans were increasingly tempted to join them – there was real danger that Congress would defy the president and vote for armed intervention. McKinley was no chocolate éclair, but he under unbearable pressure. 'Whatever happens next', France's ambassador soberly reported from Washington on 4 April, 'one must respect a president who has resisted, for as long as he has, the blind passions of this country'. McKinley maintained control of both Congress and his party – masterfully – with his 11 April message to Congress in which he made clear that he would not oppose the drive to war.<sup>78</sup> But we do not know whether in those fateful days of April 1898 McKinley had concluded that defeating Spain would be easy.

### *The Test of War*

Defeating Spain turned out to be extremely easy. Americans finally waged that 'splendid little war' that had eluded them in 1846 when they forced the Mexicans to fight. Does this prove, however, that the anti-war advocates had been utterly wrong? Not in their assessment of US strength: the US Navy was indeed second-rate, and its performance in the two naval battles with Spain was not impressive; and the US army was not ready for a major military campaign. The real mistake of the anti-war advocates was that they had wildly overestimated the Spanish navy, as the US fleet demonstrated at Manila Bay and off Santiago.

But what about the Spanish army and the dangers of a Cuban campaign? The US army, which had landed in Cuba on 22 June, fought only two battles of any significance: at El Caney and at San Juan Hill, on 1 July. The Spaniards, who were outnumbered by more than twelve to one, resisted for several hours, and their losses, including prisoners, were less than half their

<sup>78</sup> Cambon to French Foreign Minister Hanotaux, Washington DC, 4 April 1898, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Documents Diplomatiques Français (1871–1914)*, 1re Série (1871–1900) (Paris, 1957), 14: 215 quoted (hereafter MAE, *Documents*). For the burgeoning revolt in the Republican party and the Congress, see the newspapers listed in n. 10 and the *Congressional Record* from late March to 10 April; see also Offner, *Unwanted War*, pp. 150–54. For McKinley's retaining control of the Republican party and of Congress after his 11 April message, see Paul Holbo, 'Presidential Leadership in Foreign Affairs: William McKinley and the Turpie-Foraker Amendment', *American Historical Review*, July 1967, pp. 1321–35 and Offner, *Unwanted War*, pp. 177–93.

opponents' – 654 to 1385.<sup>79</sup> While the Spaniards celebrated 'our heroic soldiers', and the Europeans praised 'the stubborn tenacity of the Spanish defence', US officials worried. From the battlefield, Theodore Roosevelt wrote to Senator Henry Cabot Lodge: 'We are within measurable distance of a terrible military disaster.' The French ambassador reported from Washington, 'the attack ... was considered by everyone a bloody failure.' General Miles later wrote, 'While the news of the result of the engagement was gratifying, the situation of the troops caused much anxiety, and the severe loss that had occurred rendered the situation serious. In fact, it is impossible to describe the condition of anxiety that existed in Washington at that time.'<sup>80</sup> We know now that this anxiety was groundless, because Madrid did not intend to continue fighting.

The Spanish government had entered the war convinced that Spain would be defeated, but persuaded that the alternative – to surrender Cuba without a fight – would precipitate a revolt in the army or civil war. The US ambassador in Madrid had captured this mood well: 'they prefer the chances of war with the certain loss of Cuba', he wrote to McKinley on 26 February, 'to the overthrow of the dynasty'. The decision to fight had been made easier by the belief that defeat would mean only the loss of Cuba, an understandable error, since virtually no one in the United States had publicly voiced any interest in the Philippines.<sup>81</sup>

By early July, Spain had lost its fleet. It had been, arguably, a 'glorious disaster', to quote *El Imperial's* epitaph on the battle of Manila. As the *Saturday Review* said, 'The conduct of the Spanish naval officers and men alike at Manila and at Santiago was worthy of the best days of Spanish chivalry.'<sup>82</sup>

Since the Spanish navy had sunk with dignity and the army had fought well, Spanish honour had been saved. Furthermore, the destruction of the

<sup>79</sup> See Trask, *War with Spain*, pp. 225–48. Trask gives Spanish losses at 593 (p. 245), but I use the higher figure given by a Spanish authority, Agustín Rodríguez González in his *La Guerra del 98. Las campañas de Cuba, Puerto Rico y Filipinas* (Madrid, 1998), pp. 64–71. See also Graham Cosmas, 'San Juan Hill and El Caney, 1–2 July, 1898,' in Charles Heller and William Stofft (eds.), *America's First Battles, 1776–1965* (Lawrence, KA, 1986), pp. 109–48, and Oscar Luis Abdala Pupo, *La intervención militar norteamericana en la contienda independentista cubana: 1898* (Santiago de Cuba, 1998), pp. 112–61.

<sup>80</sup> *El Imparcial*, 8 July 1898, p. 1; *London Times*, 4 July 1898, p. 11 (ed.); Roosevelt to Lodge, outside Santiago, 3 July 1898, Morison, *Letters*, 2: 846; Ambassador Cambon to Foreign Minister Delcassé, Washington DC, 8 July 1898, MAE, *Documents*, p. 372; Nelson Miles, 'The War with Spain', II, *North American Review*, June 1899, p. 750.

<sup>81</sup> Woodford to McKinley, 26 Feb. 1898, Moore papers, box 185, LOC. On Spain's decision to fight, see Cristóbal Robles Muñoz, *1898: Diplomacia y opinión*, Madrid, 1991, pp. 5–144; Rafael Núñez Florencio, *Militarismo y antimilitarismo en España (1888–1906)* (Madrid, 1990), pp. 215–329; José Varela Ortega, 'Otra vez el 98!' in Manuel Moreno Franginals et al., *Cien años de historia de Cuba (1898–1898)* (Madrid, 2000), pp. 99–151.

<sup>82</sup> *El Imparcial*, 5 May 1898, p. 1; *Saturday Review*, 9 July 1898, p. 37.

navy made it clear that Cuba was lost, no matter what glorious feats the Spanish army there might yet perform. The US fleet would be able to tighten its blockade of the island. General Ramón Blanco, Governor-General of Cuba, had sent many anxious cables to Madrid asking for supplies. He had also indicated, in late June that the situation had improved with the arrival of several ships with food, and other blockade runners arrived in July.<sup>83</sup> The British military attaché in Cuba noted, ‘Even after the loss of Santiago, the fleet and all the communications by sea, the Spaniards might have offered a very strong resistance’ in western Cuba. In addition to what blockade runners brought, ‘It is certain that there would have been sufficient food in the western portion of the island for the Spaniards to have continued the defence’, and while many Spanish soldiers ‘from neglect, insufficient feeding and exposure ... were neither fit to march nor to fight, ... the majority, in spite of all their sufferings and ill-treatment, were strong and able to bear great hardship.’<sup>84</sup> They had shown their mettle at El Caney and San Juan Hill.

Of course, the resistance could not be sustained forever, but the army could have continued fighting for several more months. On 9 July, following the battles of El Caney and San Juan Hill and the destruction of the fleet, General Blanco cabled his assessment of the situation to Madrid. Almost every Cuban was hostile to Spain and ‘the patriotism of virtually all the Spanish community [on the island] is almost nonexistent. ... Therefore we can only count on the army ... This is intact up to now and maintains all its morale ... after brilliant battles in which even though it has lost ground it fought bravely and inflicted heavy losses on the enemy.’<sup>85</sup>

Focusing on this part of the cable, many historians have concluded that Blanco ‘argued for resistance *à l’outrance*’.<sup>86</sup> In fact, he did no such thing. Instead, he went on to list all the reasons resistance was pointless: ‘With food and munitions we could hold out for many months and make the enemy pay a heavy price for his victory, if he were to win; but the Americans’ absolute control of the sea would make our life painful due to lack of food, our battles full of anguish due to scarcity of ammunition, and our rule over

<sup>83</sup> Blanco to Correa, Havana, 27 June 1898, Política, Legajo 2424, Archivo Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Madrid (hereafter AMAE). There are many cables on supply difficulties in Legajos 2420 and 2424. On blockade runners, see also Major G. F. Leveson, ‘Report of the Military Attaché with the Spanish Forces in Cuba,’ 8 Nov. 1898, p. 18, WO 33/155, PRO and Agustín Rodríguez González, *El desastre naval de 1898* (Madrid, 1997), pp. 48–9.

<sup>84</sup> Major G. F. Leveson, ‘Report of the Military Attaché with the Spanish Forces in Cuba,’ 8 Nov. 1898, pp. 47 and 43, WO 33/155, PRO.

<sup>85</sup> Blanco to Correa, Havana, 9 July 1898, Política, Legajo 2424, AMAE.

<sup>86</sup> Hugh Thomas, *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom* (New York, 1971), p. 399 quoted; Offner, *Unwanted War*, pp. 204–6; Trask, *War With Spain*, pp. 309–10.

the population difficult due to public unrest caused by hunger, to which in the end we would all succumb.<sup>87</sup> Most important, in this sober cable Blanco never suggested or implied that the army would object should the government decide to abandon the unequal struggle.

Minister of War Miguel Correa's reply, three days later, indicated that he had understood Blanco's subtle message. After offering the obligatory praise 'for the uplifting sentiments of this army without equal', Correa came to the point: 'I understand and infer from Your Excellency's dispatch' that these noble feelings did not mean that the army would resist the government's decision, 'provided the army's honour was upheld.'<sup>88</sup>

And so it was. On 14 July Blanco replied that the army wanted to continue fighting, 'but will never obstruct the execution of the government's orders, which it will obey, as is its duty'. As a Spanish historian noted, 'The generals' ardent declarations were nothing but an attempt to "save face" ... : they all knew that the war was lost, but they preferred the government to assume the blame so that they could pretend that the peace, and therefore the rout, had been foisted on an army eager to continue fighting by Madrid's nefarious politicians.'<sup>89</sup>

For the Americans, Madrid's decision was timely. Malaria and yellow fever were felling their first US victims. On 3 August, the senior officers commanding the US units in the Santiago area stated that 'the army is disabled by malarial fever to the extent that its efficiency is destroyed' and that it must be withdrawn from Cuba 'at once, or perish'.<sup>90</sup> On 12 August, Spain signed the armistice. Had the Spaniards chosen to be as obdurate as the Mexicans in 1846 – who had been defeated in a few months but had needed two years to accept it – the United States would have been robbed, once again, of a splendid little war. But the Mexicans had been defending their own country; the Spaniards a rebellious colony, and they folded, just as the jingoes had predicted.

### *Judgements*

If we compare the arguments of anti-war advocates in Congress and in the press, two major differences are readily apparent. Few members of Congress explained why they opposed war with Spain, and when they did they tended to confine themselves to general statements that were based on moral or

<sup>87</sup> Blanco to Correa, Havana, 9 July 1898, Política, Legajo 2424, AMAE.

<sup>88</sup> Correa to Blanco, Madrid, 12 July 1898, Política, Legajo 2424, AMAE.

<sup>89</sup> Blanco to Correa, Havana, 14 July 1898, Política, Legajo 2424, AMAE; Rodríguez González, *La guerra*, p. 94.

<sup>90</sup> Major-General Kent et al. to General Shafter, Santiago, 3 Aug. 1898, in Morison, *Letters*, 2: 865–6.

legal considerations. Only four members of Congress referred to the material cost of a war with Spain, and only in very general terms. In the case of the anti-war press, however, the heart of the argument was neither legal nor moral, but a detailed balance sheet: the material cost of the war versus its rewards.

The anti-war press argued at length, with specific and concrete examples, that Spain was a strong foe that would inflict severe pain on the United States – in blood and money. These views were shared by the European press and by military experts in the United States and in Europe. They were based on a faulty assessment of the strength of the Spanish fleet and of Spain's determination to resist, on a more accurate assessment of the capability of the Spanish army in Cuba, and on a very realistic assessment of the threat posed by Cuba's diseases should the fighting on the island be prolonged.

A difficult, protracted war would exact a high toll not just in US lives, but in money. It would affect not only the country's economic recovery, but the stability of its finances, a profound danger, given the gravity of the socio-economic crisis of the preceding years. Moreover, it would play into the hands of the alleged enemies of the social order – Bryan's silverite Democrats.

Furthermore, victory would bring no rewards: the United States had interest neither in Cuban independence nor in annexing the island. The debate over war with Spain occurred at a time when race relations in the United States were particularly unsettled: in the South, where most African Americans lived, neither disfranchisement nor segregation was yet complete.<sup>91</sup> Many whites, in the North and in the South, believed that annexing Cuba, with its many blacks emboldened by the role they had played against Spain, would bring into the Union 'a country that is sure to breed interminable race antagonisms – an evil of which we already have more than enough', as Carl Schurz warned in *Harper's Weekly*.<sup>92</sup> This gloomy prospect was not mitigated by the potential acquisition of any part of the Philippines: my examination of forty-one major US newspapers and the *Congressional Record* has revealed their consistent lack of interest in acquiring an inch of the archipelago.

It is impossible to determine the relative weight of these two considerations – the high cost and the lack of rewards – and to assess whether those who were more upset by the racial issue tended to exaggerate Spanish power in order to strengthen their case (or vice versa). Nevertheless, a careful

<sup>91</sup> See Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction*, New York, 1992; Willard Gatewood, *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden, 1898–1903* (Urbana, 1975); Piero Gleijeses, 'African Americans and the War against Spain,' *The North Carolina Historical Review*, April 1996, pp. 184–214.

<sup>92</sup> Carl Schurz, *Harper's Weekly*, 26 March 1898, p. 291.

reading of the press suggests that while both concerns were real, the first – the cost – was preponderant. Indeed, to a large degree the debate in the press hinged on the assessment of Spain's ability to resist. Those newspapers that believed that it would be easy to defeat Spain tended to advocate war; those that thought it would be difficult opposed war. The anti-war camp was a minority, and what it said did not flatter the US ego. It warned that Spain could hurt the United States, that Spanish soldiers and ships could prove a formidable enemy. Its opponents, however, asserted that the United States was 'a Titan among nations', that US soldiers and sailors towered over the Spaniards and were the best in the world. War with Spain would hardly be a war – 'a tap with one finger' would suffice 'to prostrate her.'<sup>93</sup>

The analysis of the press can suggest possible reasons why members of Congress and McKinley opposed the war. And it sheds light on the attitude of the business community, confirming Pratt's conclusions and explaining why business feared that war would be costly. It also suggests the need to temper the view that business shifted en masse after the *Maine*.

Just as the anti-war forces had been wrong in assessing the cost of the war, so too they had been uncreative in their vision of the fruits of victory. They had believed that victory would bring either Cuba's independence or its annexation to the United States, but Congress found a third way: the Platt amendment, imposed at gunpoint, transformed the island into a protectorate. With refreshing candour, the staunchly Republican Cleveland *Leader* had said a few days before the war began: 'This great republic should ... get something more than the glory of whipping a fourth-rate and bankrupt nation.'<sup>94</sup> The reward was, of course, Cuba without the Cubans. Had the United States not intervened in 1898, Spain would have been able to hold on to Cuba for a while longer – one year or even two – before sheer exhaustion and the rebels' resilience forced her out.<sup>95</sup> US intervention hastened Spain's departure and robbed the Cubans of their independence. It was as if France, having intervened in the American war of independence, had demanded a naval base on Long Island and the right to send in troops

<sup>93</sup> Chicago *Tribune*, 25 Feb. 1898, p. 6 (ed.). <sup>94</sup> Cleveland *Leader*, 7 April 1898, p. 4 (ed.).

<sup>95</sup> My estimate takes into account the exhaustion of the Spanish troops on the island, the limits on Spanish manpower, the deepening bankruptcy of the Spanish state, the growing unpopularity of the war at home, the utter failure of Madrid's autonomy scheme in Cuba, and the rebels' resilience. It is consistent with the conclusions of recent Spanish scholarship. See, for example, Octavio Ruiz-Manjón and Alicia Langa (eds.), *Los significados del 98: La sociedad española en la génesis del siglo XX* (Madrid, 1999); Antonio Elorza and Elena Hernández Sandoica, *La guerra de Cuba (1895–1898): Historia política de una derrota colonial* (Madrid, 1998); Gabriel Cardona and Juan Carlos Losada, *Weyler, nuestro hombre en La Habana* (Barcelona, 1998); Juan Pan-Montojo (ed.), *Más se perdió en Cuba. España, 1898, y la crisis de fin de siglo* (Madrid, 1998); Antoni Marimon, *La crisis de 1898* (Barcelona, 1998); Jordi Maluquer de Motes, *España en la crisis de 1898* (Barcelona, 1999).

whenever it deemed it necessary. Had this happened, the US people would hardly be grateful to the French for hastening the departure of the British. What is puzzling, and yet so consistent with the fantasy of the City on the Hill, is that so many Americans believed, and still believe, that the United States fought for Cuba's independence and kept its promise. As US historian Nancy Mitchell has pointed out, 'Our selective recall not only serves a purpose; it also has repercussions. It creates a chasm between us and the Cubans: we share a past, but we have no shared memories.'<sup>96</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Nancy Mitchell, 'Remember the Myth,' *The News and Observer* (Raleigh), 1 Nov. 1998, G5.