

## Yellow Journalism

**War Fever Escalates** - In 1896, Spain responded to the Cuban revolt by sending General Valeriano Weyler to Cuba to restore order. Weyler tried to crush the rebellion by herding the entire rural population of central and western Cuba into barbed wire concentration camps. Here civilians could not give aid to rebels. An estimated 300,000 Cubans filled these camps, where thousands died from hunger and disease.

**Headline Wars** - Weyler's actions fueled a war over newspaper circulation that had developed between the American newspaper tycoons William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer. To lure readers, Hearst's *New York Journal* and Pulitzer's *New York World* printed exaggerated accounts—by reporters such as James Creelman—of “Butcher” Weyler's brutality. Stories of poisoned wells and of children being thrown to the sharks deepened American sympathy for the rebels. This sensational style of writing, which exaggerates the news to lure and enrage readers, became known as yellow journalism. Hearst and Pulitzer fanned war fever. When Hearst sent the gifted artist Frederic Remington to Cuba to draw sketches of reporters' stories, Remington informed the publisher that a war between the United States and Spain seemed very unlikely. Hearst reportedly replied, “You furnish the pictures and I'll furnish the war.”

**The U.S.S. Maine Explodes** - Early in 1898, President McKinley had ordered the *U.S.S. Maine* to Cuba to bring home American citizens in danger from the fighting and to protect American property. On February 15, 1898, the ship blew up in the harbor of Havana. More than 260 men were killed. At the time, no one really knew why the ship exploded; however, American newspapers claimed that the Spanish had blown up the ship.

**War with Spain Erupts** - Now there was no holding back the forces that wanted war. “Remember the *Maine!*” became the rallying cry for U.S. intervention in Cuba. It made no difference that the Spanish government agreed, on April 9, to almost everything the United States demanded, including a six-month cease-fire. Despite the Spanish concessions, public opinion favored war. On April 11, McKinley asked Congress for authority to use force against Spain. After a week of debate, Congress agreed, and on April 20 the United States declared war.

Source: *The Americans: Reconstruction to the 21st Century* (California Edition). (2006) Eds. Gerald, Danzer, J. Jorge Klor de Alva, Larry S. Krieger, Louis E. Wilson, and Nancy Woloch. McDougal Littell. pp. 347-8.

1. Do you think a reputable newspaper today could utilize yellow journalism in a manner similar to *The Journal* or *The World*? Why or why not?

2. Do you think the U.S. would have gone to war without the newspapers' influence? Why or why not?

3. Which do you think is more dangerous, yellow journalism or misinformation on the web? Why?