

# Working with Primary Sources: The Spanish-American War

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Class Period: \_\_\_\_\_

*Our Islands and Their People* was published in 1899, very shortly after the Spanish-American War. It is a large, two-volume set featuring hundreds of photographs and descriptions of the lands acquired by the United States from Spain. The introduction is written by Major-General Joseph Wheeler, who served in both the Spanish-American War and the Philippine War (as well as previously serving in the Civil War).

While it is not the purpose of this book to treat especially of the late war with Spain, a brief resumé of the leading events of that memorable contest will not be out of place.

The war of 1898 was probably more essentially a war of the people than any other conflict of arms in which this country has been engaged. The long continued series of atrocities practiced by the Spanish officials in Cuba exhausted the patience and aroused the humane sentiments of American citizens to such a degree as to compel positive action upon the part of the government. The destruction of the "Maine" in the harbor of Havana intensified the feeling of indignation throughout the United States; and this terrible catastrophe, though not the cause of the outbreak of hostilities, certainly hastened the action of Congress in its declaration of war against Spain.

When war was first contemplated the most serious apprehensions prevailed. The navy of Spain, as reported in her official documents, was more formidable than ours; her naval forces numbered two to our one, and her ships as described on paper were quite as powerful and, as some contended, even stronger than those of the American navy. Our coastwise trade became paralyzed, and the cities of New Orleans, Galveston, Mobile, Savannah and Charleston were gorged with merchandise awaiting vessels upon which it could be transported to other ports. All our Atlantic cities felt more or less apprehension, and prompt and effectual measures were taken for their defense. Many persons who had arranged to spend their summer in Europe declined to incur

the risk of capture on the high seas and remained at home. Many of the handsome residences along the Jersey coast were without tenants owing to the general and very natural fear that Spanish cruisers, approaching the Atlantic coast, might easily effect their destruction.

Dewey's magnificent victory of May 1<sup>st</sup>, resulting in the capture or destruction of Admiral Montojo's entire squadron, contributed to allay these apprehensions. Yet, when the American army left Tampa for Santiago, it was considered necessary that the transports bearing the soldiers should be convoyed by a number of our strongest ships of war; and it was not until the destruction of Cervera's fleet in front of Santiago and the capture of that place by the Americans that our people realized the helplessness of the Spanish army.

The success of our arms far exceeded the expectations of the most sanguine. Prior to July 1<sup>st</sup>, no one would have regarded it possible for the purposes of the war to be accomplished in less than one or two years of hard fighting. The expedition to Santiago was considered a mere beginning of the task confronting our government. Success in that quarter was to be followed by a descent upon Havana, where it was supposed the great struggle would take place. It was known that the Spanish army in Cuba exceeded in number two hundred thousand men, and it seemed unreasonable to expect that they would give up the struggle before their military power was exhausted.

That this was the view taken by the administration is evidenced by the magnitude of

the preparations for the conflict. Our army was increased from twenty-five thousand to two hundred and twenty-five thousand men. This large force was promptly assembled, armed and equipped, and prepared for active service. Ships for war purposes were purchased wherever it was possible to find them; pleasure yachts were secured and converted into fast cruisers; and warlike preparations of all kinds were in progress when, to the surprise of the world, just after the fall of Santiago, Spain made overtures for peace.

The army of Santiago, numbering 16,887 officers and men, under the command of Major-General Shafter, sailed from Tampa June 14<sup>th</sup>, followed a few days later by reinforcements to the number of several thousand. After a quiet and uneventful voyage the transports reached the vicinity of Santiago on the 20<sup>th</sup>, and with the assistance of the navy commenced disembarking on the morning of the 22<sup>nd</sup>. General Lawton's division was the first to land, but a portion of the cavalry division, 964 strong, consisting of two squadrons of the First Volunteers, or "Rough Riders," and one squadron each of the First and Tenth Regular Cavalry—all dismounted—were on shore by the evening of the 23<sup>rd</sup>, and passed Gen. Lawton's troops at Siboney on the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup>, in pursuit of a body of Spaniards who had left there on the approach of the Americans and taken up a position about three or four miles further on at a place known as La Guasimas.

The location of the Spaniards was accurately known by the Americans and the attack was deliberately planned. The cavalry division advanced by two parallel roads or trails about a mile apart; the right hand column consisted of the regular cavalry under the immediate command of the brigade commander, Gen. Young, accompanied by the division commander and supported by two Hotchkiss guns; the left hand column comprised the First Volunteers under the command of Col. Leonard Wood.

The enemy were discovered shortly after 7 o'clock A.M., and after a warm flight which gave them a good idea of the superb qualities of the American soldier, the Spaniards retreated hastily towards Santiago, leaving us in possession

of a beautiful and well-watered camping ground in full view of Santiago and the surrounding country. The remainder of the first week on shore was spent in locating our troops as they advanced from their landing places, and in reconnoitering in our front to discover the location and strength of the defenses of the city.

July 1<sup>st</sup> ushered in the battle of Santiago, which really consisted of two distinct battles, El Caney and San Juan, succeeded by a long siege of the fortified city. The reduction of El Caney, an important outpost northeast of Santiago, was entrusted to General Lawton's division, assisted by General Bates' brigade and a small Cuban force, in all about 7,000 men; while the cavalry and Kent's division of infantry advanced against San Juan, an elevation nearer to and directly east of the city. It was expected that Lawton would take El Caney in one or two hours, and he was then to advance and join Kent and Wheeler in the attack on the main position; but the resistance encountered at El Caney was much stronger and more obstinate than had been anticipated, and the battle raged there for the greater part of the day until the afternoon, when after a most gallant assault the stone fort and blockhouse were taken and the town was in the hands of the victorious Lawton.

Meanwhile the cavalry and Kent's division, while crossing the San Juan River and deploying on the other side, found themselves under a galling fire, in consequence of the perfect range of the road acquired by the Spaniards at San Juan, and an immediate advance was necessary. This was made with superb gallantry by both divisions, and before night Fort San Juan and the ridge in front of the city were in our possession. Our strength was terribly depleted by exhaustion, by the casualties of the day, and by the absence of men detailed to care for their dead and wounded comrades; but in spite of our inferiority in numbers, the position so gallantly won was hastily entrenched and securely held against the attacks of the enemy until the arrival of Bates and Lawton early next morning, and of other reinforcements later on, rendered it impregnable. Fighting continued all day during July 2<sup>nd</sup>, but with few

casualties, both sides being well protected by their entrenchments.

On July 3<sup>rd</sup>, the destruction of Cervera's fleet by our matchless navy aroused the confidence of the besiegers, and in a corresponding degree depressed the spirits of the besieged. July 6<sup>th</sup>, the gallant Hobson and his men were exchanged for Spanish prisoners captured by the army on the 1<sup>st</sup>. The siege of the city continued with fighting at intervals, notably on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, when a simultaneous attack was made by the army and navy.

Then followed the negotiations for the surrender of the city. The commissioners appointed to conduct these negotiations were General Wheeler, General Lawton and Lieutenant Miley on the part of the United States, and General Escario, Colonel Frontan and Mr. Robert Mason on the part of Spain. The conferences, which were held beneath the famous ceiba tree, between the lines, occupied the greater part of three days and closed on the 16<sup>th</sup> of July. On the 17<sup>th</sup> General Toral formally surrendered to General Shafter his army, about twenty-four

thousand strong, the city and division of Santiago, and all the munitions of war contained therein. The Spanish flag which had floated over the old city for nearly four centuries was furled forever, and the Stars and Stripes were triumphantly raised above her ancient battlements. Soon after the fall of that city, the Spanish government made overtures for a settlement, and the signing of the Peace Protocol put an end to the short but brilliant campaign in Porto Rico.

The Spanish-American War, though comparatively insignificant in point of duration and in the importance of its engagements, was fraught with momentous consequences which can hardly be overestimated. At one blow vast colonial possessions were stricken from the grasp of Spain, and millions of human beings were transferred from a narrow monarchical system of government to a republic founded on the broadest principles of civil and religious liberty. The result of our contest with Spain has brought us added responsibilities, broader hopes and loftier aspirations.

### Questions:

1. According to Wheeler, what role did the sinking of the *Maine* play in causing the war? \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. According to Wheeler, what were the causes of the war? \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. How did Americans feel about the pending war? \_\_\_\_\_  
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4. How was the war won by the United States? \_\_\_\_\_  
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5. What were the results of the Spanish-American War? \_\_\_\_\_  
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6. What are the pros and cons of reading this primary source? Consider the writer and his position. \_\_\_\_\_  
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# Ambivalent Empire

The last decades of the 19th century were a period of imperial expansion for the United States. The American story took a different course from that of its European rivals, however, because of the U.S. history of struggle against European empires and its unique democratic development.

The sources of American expansionism in the late 19th century were varied. Internationally, the period was one of imperialist frenzy, as European powers raced to carve up Africa and competed, along with Japan, for influence and trade in Asia. Many Americans, including influential figures such as Theodore Roosevelt, Henry Cabot Lodge, and Elihu Root, felt that to safeguard its own interests, the United States had to stake out spheres of economic influence as well. That view was seconded by a powerful naval lobby, which called for an expanded fleet and network of overseas ports as essential to the economic and political security of the nation. More generally, the doctrine of "manifest destiny," first used to justify America's continental expansion, was now revived to assert that the United States had a right and duty to extend its influence and civilization in the Western Hemisphere and the Caribbean, as well as across the Pacific.

At the same time, voices of anti-imperialism from diverse coalitions of Northern Democrats and reform-minded Republicans remained loud and constant. As a result, the acquisition of a U.S. empire was piecemeal and ambivalent. Colonial-minded administrations were often more concerned with trade and economic issues than political control.

The United States' first venture beyond its continental borders was the purchase of Alaska – sparsely populated by Inuit and other native peoples – from Russia in 1867. Most Americans were either indifferent to or indignant at this action by Secretary of State William Seward, whose critics called Alaska "Seward's Folly" and "Seward's Icebox." But 30 years later, when gold was discovered on Alaska's Klondike River, thousands of Americans headed north, and many of them settled in Alaska permanently. When Alaska became the 49th state in 1959, it replaced Texas as geographically the largest state in the Union.

The Spanish-American War, fought in 1898, marked a turning point in U.S. history. It left the United States exercising control or influence over islands in the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific.

By the 1890s, Cuba and Puerto Rico were the only remnants of Spain's once vast empire in the New World, and the Philippine Islands comprised the core of Spanish power in the Pacific. The outbreak of war had three principal sources: popular hostility to autocratic Spanish rule in Cuba; U.S. sympathy with the Cuban fight for independence; and a new spirit of national assertiveness, stimulated in part by a nationalistic and sensationalist press.

By 1895 Cuba's growing restiveness had become a guerrilla war of independence. Most Americans were sympathetic with the Cubans, but President Cleveland was determined to preserve neutrality. Three years later, however, during the administration of William McKinley, the U.S. warship *Maine*, sent to Havana on a "courtesy visit" designed to remind the Spanish of American concern over the rough handling of the insurrection, blew up in the harbor. More than 250 men were killed. The *Maine* was probably destroyed by an accidental internal explosion, but most Americans believed the Spanish were responsible. Indignation, intensified by sensationalized press coverage, swept across the country. McKinley tried to preserve the peace, but within a few months, believing delay futile, he recommended armed intervention.

The war with Spain was swift and decisive. During the four months it lasted, not a single American reverse of any importance occurred. A week after the

declaration of war, Commodore George Dewey, commander of the six-warship Asiatic Squadron then at Hong Kong, steamed to the Philippines. Catching the entire Spanish fleet at anchor in Manila Bay, he destroyed it without losing an American life.

Meanwhile, in Cuba, troops landed near Santiago, where, after winning a rapid series of engagements, they fired on the port. Four armored Spanish cruisers steamed out of Santiago Bay to engage the American navy and were reduced to ruined hulks.

From Boston to San Francisco, whistles blew and flags waved when word came that Santiago had fallen. Newspapers dispatched correspondents to Cuba and the Philippines, who trumpeted the renown of the nation's new heroes. Chief among them were Commodore Dewey and Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, who had resigned as assistant secretary of the navy to lead his volunteer regiment, the "Rough Riders," to service in Cuba. Spain soon sued for an end to the war. The peace treaty signed on December 10, 1898, transferred Cuba to the United States for temporary occupation preliminary to the island's independence. In addition, Spain ceded Puerto Rico and Guam in lieu of war indemnity, and the Philippines for a U.S. payment of \$20 million.

Officially, U.S. policy encouraged the new territories to move toward democratic self-government, a political system with which none of them had any previous experience. In fact, the United

States found itself in a colonial role. It maintained formal administrative control in Puerto Rico and Guam, gave Cuba only nominal independence, and harshly suppressed an armed independence movement in the Philippines. (The Philippines gained the right to elect both houses of its legislature in 1916. In 1936 a largely autonomous Philippine Commonwealth was established. In 1946, after World War II, the islands finally attained full independence.)

U.S. involvement in the Pacific area was not limited to the Philippines. The year of the Spanish-American War also saw the beginning of a new relationship with the Hawaiian Islands. Earlier contact with Hawaii had been mainly through missionaries and traders. After 1865, however, American investors began to develop the islands' resources – chiefly sugar cane and pineapples.

When the government of Queen Liliuokalani announced its intention to end foreign influence in 1893, American businessmen joined with influential Hawaiians to depose her. Backed by the American ambassador to Hawaii and U.S. troops stationed there, the new government then asked to be annexed to the United States. President Cleveland, just beginning his second term, rejected annexation, leaving Hawaii nominally independent until the Spanish-American War, when, with the backing of President McKinley, Congress ratified an annexation treaty. In 1959 Hawaii would become the 50th state.

To some extent, in Hawaii especially, economic interests had a role in American expansion, but to influential policy makers such as Roosevelt, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, and Secretary of State John Hay, and to influential strategists such as Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, the main impetus was geostrategic. For these people, the major dividend of acquiring Hawaii was Pearl Harbor, which would become the major U.S. naval base in the central Pacific. The Philippines and Guam complemented other Pacific bases – Wake Island, Midway, and American Samoa. Puerto Rico was an important foothold in a Caribbean area that was becoming increasingly important as the United States contemplated a Central American canal.

U.S. colonial policy tended toward democratic self-government. As it had done with the Philippines, in 1917 the U.S. Congress granted Puerto Ricans the right to elect all of their legislators. The same law also made the island officially a U.S. territory and gave its people American citizenship. In 1950 Congress granted Puerto Rico complete freedom to decide its future. In 1952, the citizens voted to reject either statehood or total independence, and chose instead a commonwealth status that has endured despite the efforts of a vocal separatist movement. Large numbers of Puerto Ricans have settled on the mainland, to which they have free access and where they enjoy all the political and civil rights of any other citizen of the United States.

1. Why did influential figures such as Theodore Roosevelt, Elihu Root, and Henry Cabot Lodge advocate American imperialism?

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2. How was the doctrine of "manifest destiny" revived to justify American imperialism?

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3. The purchase of what from Russia, by Secretary of State William Seward in 1867, was known as "Seward's Folly"?

- a. Alaska
- b. Guam
- c. Hawaii
- d. Philippines

4. What 1898 event left the United States exercising control or influence over islands in the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean?

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5. What ship blew up in Havana's harbor in 1898?

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6. Who destroyed the Spanish fleet at anchor in Manila Bay?

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7. When did the Philippines attain full independence?

- a. 1898
- b. 1918
- c. 1946
- d. 1991

8. Who was the last monarch of Hawaii?

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9. For influential American policy makers, what was the major dividend of acquiring Hawaii?

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10. American colonial policy tended toward self-government.

- a. True
- b. False

11. Puerto Ricans enjoy full U.S. citizenship and access to the mainland United States.

- a. True
- b. False