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### Spanish-American War: Causes, Consequences, and Opposition

The Spanish-American War was a brief, but important, event in US diplomatic history, shaping Spanish-American relations and achieving independence for the country of Cuba (“Spanish-American War: History, Causes, Outcome, & Effects”). The war, which took place from 1898 to 1899, officially deconstructed Spanish colonialism in the Americas and began an era of controversial American expansion. It is important to discuss the causes and consequences of the war, as well as who opposed American expansion, as the war plays a significant part in American history.

A combination of sensationalized journaling, Spanish atrocities against Cuba, and the fear of European powers all contributed to the United States declaring war against Spain. First, sensationalized journaling, often called “yellow journalism,” played a pivotal role in influencing American public opinion towards Cuban uprisings that began in 1895 (“Spanish-American War: History, Causes, Outcome, & Effects”). Influential journalists like Joseph Pulitzer (the namesake of the Pulitzer Prize) wrote highly emotional entries about the actions of Spanish authorities towards Cuban dissenters. Since the rebellion started, Spain established detention centers where rebelling Cubans were housed in poor conditions. Situations like these were highly exaggerated by the press, often without proper research, to drive growth in newspaper sales, which had been struggling. The result was poorly researched, dramatic stories that stirred Americans and

Congress to outrage, effectively guaranteeing a declaration of war. Secondly, Spanish authorities in Cuba were severely punishing those involved in Cuban rebellions, and some felt America had a moral obligation to intervene (“Spanish American Conflict of 1898: Treaties and Self-Determination”). Certainly, all Americans felt that American investments in Cuba should be protected through military or political pressure. As a result, when Spain stated that it would not grant Cuba independence, the United States sent a navy vessel, the *USS Maine*, to Havana, Cuba to protect US citizens in Cuba and to establish a United States military presence there. However, the vessel mysteriously exploded soon after its arrival, prompting US journalists and officials to begin convincing the public it was a direct act of aggression by the Spanish. This was part of a larger narrative that Spain was perpetuating unspeakable violence in Latin America and therefore the United States had a moral, economic, and political duty to remove Spain from Cuba. Lastly, historians have stated a further reason for why the US declared war on Spain: the US feared strong, European powers within the Americas. It was the policy of many important US officials to intervene in foreign affairs to protect the interests of the country, and since Spain posed national security, as well as economic, risk, the US felt it had to act. The US had once been a colony itself, so with the memory of the American Revolution fresh in mind, the American public was convinced Spain must go.

Although the war only lasted four months, it had significant geopolitical, military, and economic consequences (“Spanish-American War: History, Causes, Outcome, & Effects”). After the end of the war in 1899, Spain and the United States came to an agreement called the Treaty of Paris (ushistory.org). The treaty granted Cuba independence and transferred the territories of the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico to the United States. This effectively ended Spanish colonialism in the Americas and began an imperialist trajectory for the United States shaped by

President William McKinley's expansionary policies, which found favor with the American public. The war's military consequences may be most clearly observed in the Philippine Insurrection, which directly followed the Spanish-American War. The Filipino people felt it was unjust that America deemed them unfit to govern themselves and staged a 3-year revolt led by Emilio Aguinaldo. The revolt was subsequently crushed by US military forces, but not before claiming 4,000 American lives, ten times the casualties as the Spanish-American War. Lastly, just as the Spanish-American War had economic causes, it had economic consequences. Spain was awarded \$20 million for its losses, a small price for its colonies, while the United States gained important lease deals and secured its economic interests in Latin America and beyond ("Spanish-American War: History, Causes, Outcome, & Effects"). One of these lease deals was for Guantanamo Bay, which was liberated from Spanish rule two months into the Spanish-American War. Since 1903, America has been making payments to Cuba for control of the harbor. Additionally, Cuban independence, as well as the acquisition of Guam, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico opened new financial markets for US exports, which was a significant source of profits for American firms during that period (Office of the Historian). Specifically, several industries within Cuba improved after the war's conclusion, including the sugar industry, which the United States held significant stock in. At its conclusion, the Spanish-American War resulted in significant political and economic gains for the United States, while it negatively impacted the geopolitical dominance of the Kingdom of Spain.

While the Spanish-American War benefited the United States, the US expansionary policies that sparked the war faced significant opposition from part of the American public. In particular, the Anti-Imperialist League, which was founded in June 1898 in response to the War, believed that the colonial policies President McKinley was spearheading were inherently un-

American (Hutchinson). The League believed in the principles of liberty and “consent by the governed,” upon which America had been founded, and advocated that these principles be applied to other nations. Acquiring territories and adopting an expansionary policy, it argued, violated the very foundation of the American constitution. The League published stories of the atrocities committed by Americans against Filipinos and utilized different mediums such as printed newspapers, photographs, and lectures to inform the American public of the dangers of imperialism in America. Despite the group’s efforts to sway public opinion, most Americans continued to subscribe to McKinley’s expansionary policy and advocate for increased American dominance on the global stage. As a result, the US remained firmly expansionary throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by expanding its territory and increasing its economic gains through the subjection of several nations to itself.

Though brief, the Spanish-American War has had long-lasting consequences that continue to impact discussions on foreign policy within America. Indeed, since our nation’s inception, it has grappled with its role in ensuring world peace and preserving its economic and political interests. Analyzing its causes and consequences, as well as the opposition of the Anti-Imperialist League, reveals the complexity of geopolitics and its role in American history. Further exploration of historical US foreign policy and its long-run consequences will contribute valuable insight into the discourse of foreign policy in American politics.

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