

“THE SPLENDID LITTLE WAR”

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR



SAVE ME FROM MY FRIENDS!

In this image from *Puck* magazine, Uncle Sam, wearing a sword, uses the American flag to shield a woman labeled “Cuba Libre” (“free Cuba”) from three men wearing hats labeled “Insurgent Leader.” They are standing on soil labeled “Cuba” and picture the “U.S.” as just across a narrow body of water. The message here is that it isn’t just the Spanish that Cuba needs to be saved from, it’s also the Cuban insurrectionists waiting to take over.

BACKGROUND

The virtual annihilation of indigenous peoples within the continental United States by the early 1900’s allowed national attention to turn outward. Interest in developing markets in China and plans for a canal through Central America set the stage for a new level of expansionist strategizing. The Caribbean was a region with a strong economic relationship to the U.S., and had long been regarded by many as a natural extension of our republic. By the late 1890’s American citizens owned about 50 million dollars’

worth of Cuban property, primarily in the sugar, tobacco, and iron industries.

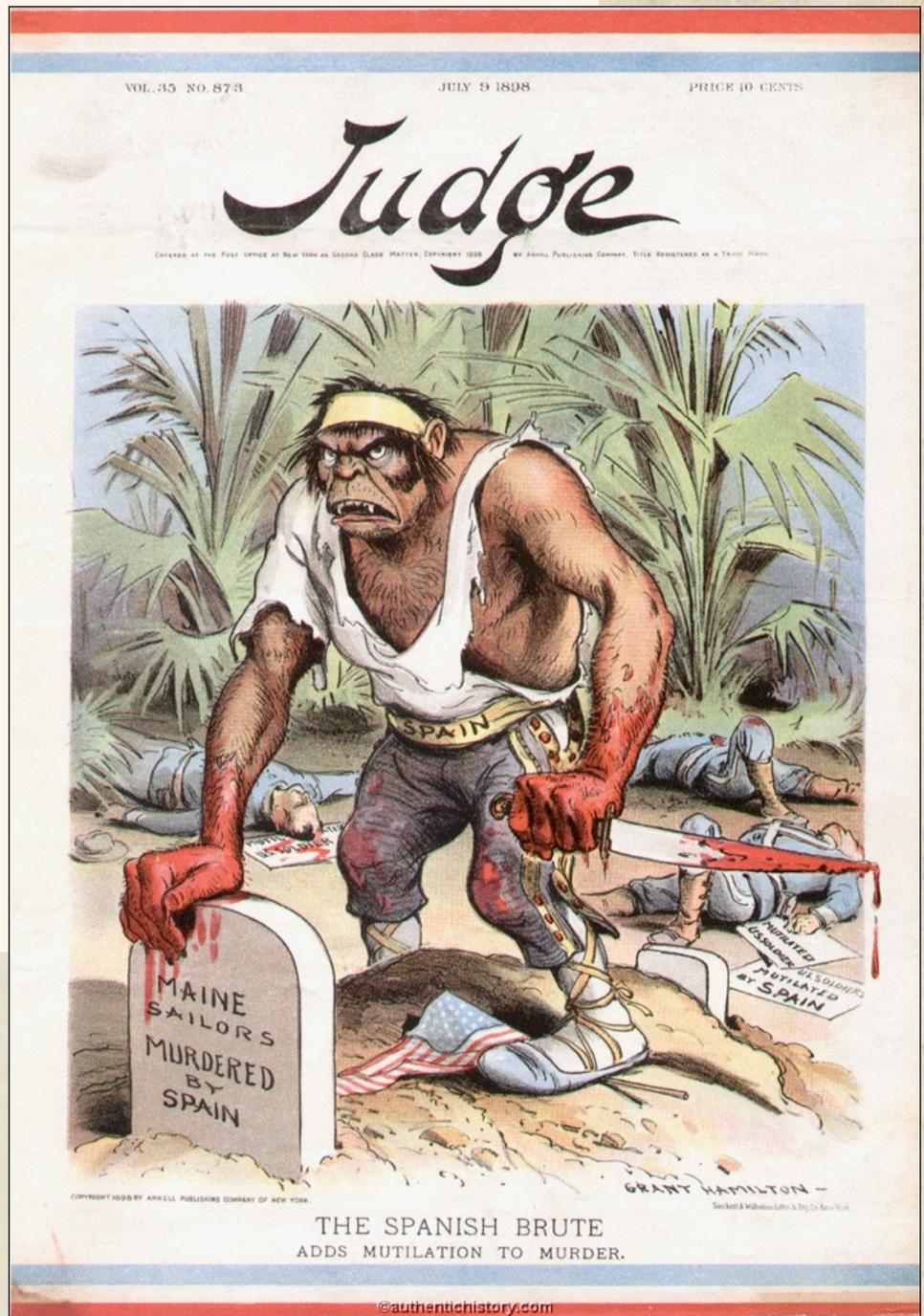
Life under Spanish rule in Cuba had become progressively harsh and revolution broke out in 1895. President William McKinley was under tremendous public pressure to defend U.S. interests on the island. “The media,” at this point in history represented by the newspaper chains of Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst, had a field day stirring up outrage against the Spanish colonial government’s many atrocities. As rebel forces gained popular support, the

THE SPANISH BRUTE, ADDS
MUTILATION TO MURDER

Judge, July 9, 1898, by Grant Hamilton. Following the fighting on San Juan Heights and El Caney, reports surfaced of Spanish mutilation of fallen US soldiers, prompting this *Judge* Magazine cover.

military resorted to moving entire villages into “reconcentration” sites and erecting massive cleared and fenced demilitarized zones.

Two events in early 1898 helped justify U.S. involvement, the publication of a stolen private letter from Señor Dupuy de Lome (the Spanish Minister to the United States) to a friend in Havana characterizing McKinley as “a weakling...a bidder for the admiration of the crowd”, and the sinking of the U.S.S. Maine in Havana harbor on February 15, with a loss of 260 men. The Maine was there on a “goodwill visit,” and although eventually a board of inquiry by American naval officers determined the cause to be a submarine mine, no persons or party were officially blamed for the incident. However, popular opinion was clearly building against Spain, and war frenzy was breaking out.



THE WAR

On April 19 Congress passed a joint resolution proclaiming Cuba “free and independent”, and when signed by McKinley the next day amounted to a declaration of war.

The first military action of the war was the battle for Manila in the Philippines. At the eve of the war, a squadron of six vessels under the command of Commodore George Dewey were in Hong Kong, and they

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THE ROUGH RIDERS.

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This January 1897 fanciful cover shows Colonel Roosevelt bravely leading the charge up San Juan Hill. Unlike later, more sophisticated paintings, however, it correctly shows him on foot rather than astride a galloping horse.

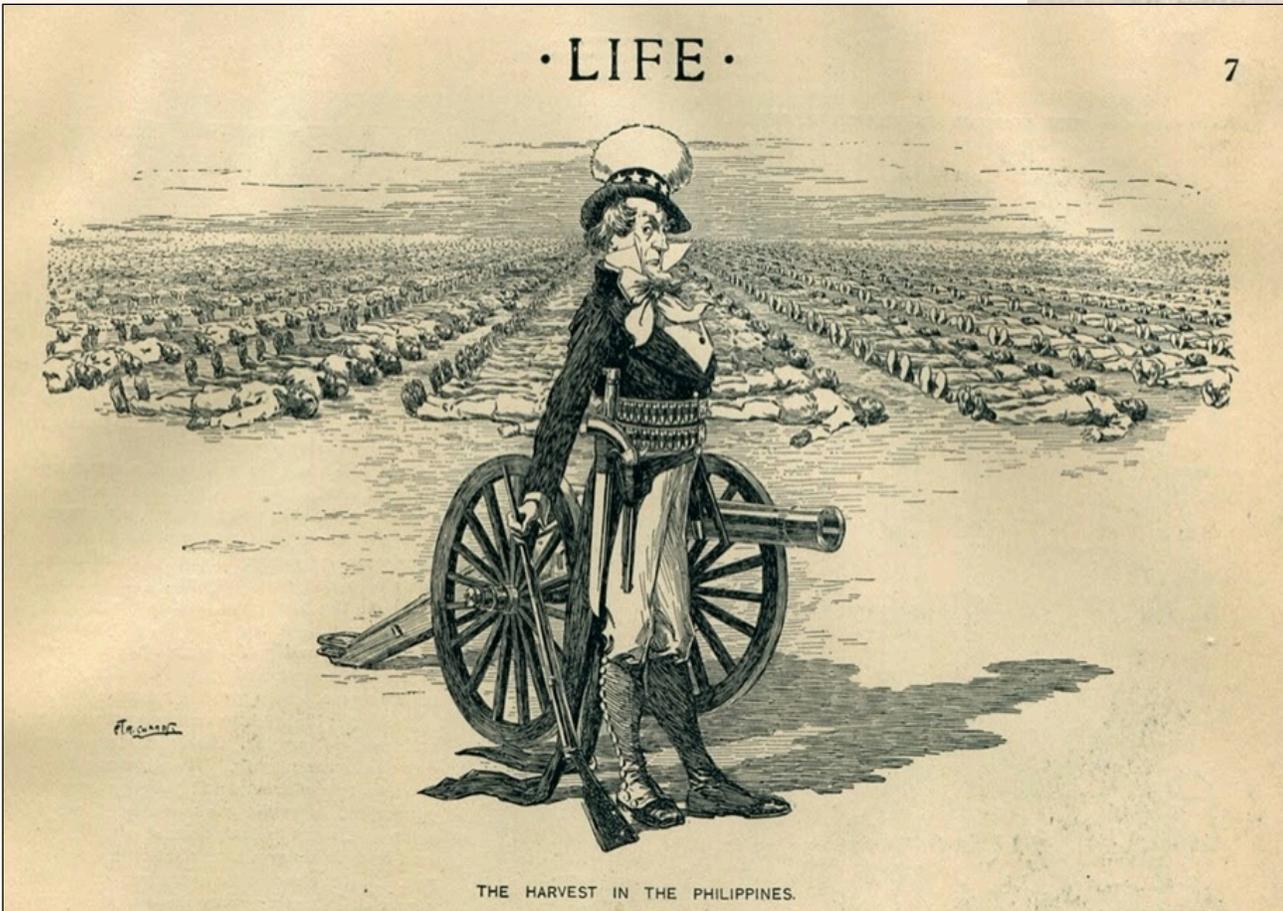
dinated land-sea operations. It was enormously fortuitous for the U.S. that the Spanish forces were even less prepared. The Spanish fleet, after successfully crossing the Atlantic, managed to trap itself in Santiago Bay, and was destroyed by the U.S. navy as they tried to flee

the blockaded harbor.

Meanwhile 17,000 more or less trained, poorly equipped but enthusiastic U.S. troops under W. R. Shafter landed and undertook a campaign to capture Santiago. The Spanish forces were weak, but there was some heavy fighting at El Caney and San Juan Hill, where the Rough Riders, under Leonard Wood and Theodore Roosevelt, won their popular reputation. On July 17, Santiago surrendered. The war was, in effect, over. For the following two weeks 3,000 U.S. troops moved on to Puerto Rico, encountering little resistance.

immediately departed for the Spanish possession of the Philippines. The Spanish fleet and the batteries surrounding Manila were destroyed May 1 without a single U.S. casualty. However, the conquest of Manila itself became as much a political as a military one; the U.S. did not want the Filipinos to gain control, and was negotiating a separate surrender with the Spanish.

At the same time, the U.S. braced for war in the Caribbean. Despite the gradual buildup of hostilities, the U.S. armed forces were ill-equipped and untrained for war, especially one involving highly coor-



THE HARVEST IN THE PHILIPPINES.

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In this anti-imperialist cartoon from the humor magazine *Life*, Uncle Sam is standing fully armed looking away from a multitude of slaughtered Filipinos, haughtily demonstrating his handy work.

Back in the Philippines, 11,000 ground troops were sent in, and an uneasy alliance between insurgent Filipino and U.S. forces led to Spanish surrender August 14. Although the Filipinos initially appreciated the U.S. role in helping evict their Spanish rulers, tensions mounted as it became clear that our interest there had less to do with protecting democracy than it did with territorial expansion. Even before the peace treaty was signed, U.S. troops fired on a group of Filipinos and started the Philippine-American War, a vicious and ugly chapter in U.S. history that lasted until 1914. Openly racist views of the Filipinos underscored public debate and policy. The actual death toll will never be known, but estimates of the number of civilians that perished from famine, disease, and

other war-related causes range from 200,000 to 600,000. In March 1906 an estimated 600 Muslim Filipinos—men, women, and children—were massacred over a four-day period under troops commanded by General Leonard Wood, who later became the Philippine governor general.

This war had started out as a very popular campaign, but by this time the shine had worn off and some brave citizens began to raise their voices in protest. Among them was the great American author Mark Twain. He pointed out the enormous contradictions between our “benevolent” foreign policy and its brutal consequences. He became an active member and eventually head of the Anti-Imperialist League, and as such, was a frequent and vocal critic of Amer-



A violent Uncle Sam in a military uniform enforces “peace” with Spain, while flags wave over its former possessions. A happy capitalist (left) credits *Judge* magazine for the message.

ica’s involvement in other, sovereign countries. Recounting his return from a lengthy trip abroad during which the takeover of the former Spanish possessions occurred, Twain wrote,

“I left these shores, at Vancouver, a red-hot imperialist. I wanted the American eagle to go screaming into the Pacific. . . But I have thought some more, since then, and I have read carefully the treaty of Paris, and I have seen that we do not intend to free, but to subjugate the people of the Philippines. We have gone there to conquer, not to redeem.”

The war resulted in other collateral imperial conquests as well. One was the annexation of the Hawaiian Islands July 7, 1898. Although U.S. interests had long coveted formal control of the islands, it was not until the government declared Hawaii necessary as a navy base that it was formally annexed. It was also during the December 12, 1898 peace treaty signing that the U.S. added Guam to the list of controlled territories.



“I am an anti-imperialist. I am opposed to having the eagle put its talons on any other land.” (Image of Twain as a defending lion running off the imperialists, from *Life* magazine, 1901)

VICE PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT

In this satire of the presidential campaign of 1900, the vice presidential candidate, Teddy Roosevelt, is the primary focus, with his presidential running mate, a tiny William McKinley, along for the ride. Roosevelt is wearing his Rough Rider uniform and is armed with press releases in his cartridge belt.



AFTERMATH

In the end, U.S. goals were overwhelmingly achieved. Cuba's struggle for independence had been hijacked to become the "Spanish-American War." The Caribbean was "secured", allowing for construction of the Panama canal. In Asia, shipping routes and military facilities were established. The U.S. finally became an international player. It was characteristic of the U.S. role in the conflict that the efforts of Cuban patriots before and during the war were belittled. Cuban forces were prohibited from attending their own surrender ceremonies, and Cuban representatives were not invited to the peace treaty signing in Paris. The army of occupation demobilized the mostly black Cuban army but appointed Spanish officers to security positions. By 1902, the Cubans accepted the Platt Amendment (which,

among other things, gave the U.S. the unconditional right to intervene in Cuba's internal affairs and perpetual rights to the coaling station at Guantanamo Bay) as the only alternative to remaining under direct U.S. military rule. A cycle of dependence on U.S. approval had begun, only to be eventually broken with the revolution against Batista in 1959.

On the domestic front, Theodore ("Teddy") Roosevelt, enjoying a rush of popularity from his exploits as a volunteer officer in the Rough Rider cavalry attacks on Kettle Hill near Santiago, became vice-president with McKinley's re-election in 1900. On September 5, 1901 he became president after McKinley was assassinated.