

The Explosion of the USS Maine: The Controversial Event That Led to the Spanish-American War

Charles River Editors



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"Remember the Maine, to Hell with Spain!"

The USS Maine is one of the most famous ships in American history, but for all the wrong reasons. A symbol of naval strength in the late 19th century, the Maine's tragic fate is taught to students across the nation, not just because it was a disaster but because it is associated with the most notorious examples of yellow journalism in the country's history and ultimately brought about a war, despite the fact it's still unclear what caused the ship's explosion.

In 1898, one of Spain's last possessions in the New World, Cuba, was waging a war for independence against Spain. Though Cuba was technically exempted from the United States' Monroe Doctrine since Cuba was already a possession of Spain when the Monroe Doctrine was issued, many Americans believed that the United States should side with Cuba against Spain. At the same time, however, President William McKinley wanted to avoid getting tangled in a war between outsiders, while Spain also wanted to avoid any conflict with United States and its powerful navy.

Despite leaders hoping to stay above the fray, American economic interests were being harmed by the ongoing conflict between Cuban nationalists and Spain, as merchants' trading with Cuba was suffering now that the island was undergoing conflict. Furthermore, the American press capitalized on the ongoing Cuban struggle for independence, which had been flaring up time and again since 1868. In an effort to sell papers, the press frequently sensationalized stories, which came to be known as yellow journalism, and during the run-up to war, yellow journalism spread false stories about the Cuban conflict in order to sell newspapers in the competitive New York City market.

Despite President McKinley's wishes to avoid a war, he was forced to support a war with Spain after the USS Maine suffered an explosion in Havana's harbor in February 1898. McKinley had sent the ship to help protect American citizens in Cuba from the violence that was taking place there, but the explosion devastated the USS Maine, which had to be towed to harbor and eventually scuttled, but only after 266 American sailors aboard the ship were killed.

Although the cause of the explosion was never determined, yellow journalists in the American press blamed Spain, claiming the USS Maine was sabotaged. President McKinley was unable to resist popular pressure after a U.S. Navy report also claimed that the ship had been subjected to an explosion outside of its hull, which subsequently ignited its powder magazines inside the ship. Later investigations proved inconclusive, but President McKinley was now forced to accept war with Spain, bringing about the Spanish-American War.

The Explosion of the USS Maine chronicles the controversial explosion, tracing the history of the ship from its glorious beginning to its ignominious end, as well as the critical aftermath. Along with pictures of

important people, places, and events, you will learn about the USS Maine like never before, in no time at all.

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