

The Spanish-American War: Three Who Made A War

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The Spanish-American War was caused by three people: Teddy Roosevelt, Henry Cabot Lodge, and William Randolph Hearst. The war, which killed a number of Spaniards and Americans, including some prominent Harvard "Swells," was based entirely on lies and machinations of these three men and served no purpose other than their personal needs. Princeton University historian Evan Thomas calls these three monsters The War Lovers.

Hearst needed a war to build his newspaper circulation. Roosevelt needed a war to slate his blood-lust and desire for military glory. Lodge needed a war to reinvigorate American manhood and to enlist American manhood in his "Large Policy" of American Empire. Between them, thanks to the ignorance and stupidity of the American people, they pulled it off.

Their adversary was Speaker of the House, Thomas Brackett Reed, "the Czar," the most powerful politician in Washington. Reed, an honest and incorruptible politician, saw Lodge's policy of "American exceptionalism" as naked imperialism that stood in total opposition and in great danger to American purposes. Reed saw Roosevelt's war lust as a diversion of national purpose from the reconstruction of an economy that increasingly served a shrinking minority at the expense of the American people. But Hearst, Roosevelt, and Lodge made "peace" an epithet. The American people, whose gullibility is never-ending, were captivated by war-lust. Reed lost confidence in the American people whom he so well served. Reed could find no moral purpose in pushing the country toward war over nothing but fake news reports by "yellow journalism."

Only a few years previously, Reed had had to halt the Cleveland administration from going to war with Great Britain over a British boundary dispute with Venezuela concerning mineral-rich land claimed by British Guyana. Somehow this boundary dispute, which had no more to do with US security than Honduras, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, Georgia, Ukraine, and the South China Sea have today, was seen as a "threat to US national security."

Roosevelt and Lodge were ecstatic over the possibility of War with Great Britain. War was its own goal. Roosevelt wrote to Lodge: "I don't care whether our sea coast cities are bombarded or not; we would take Canada." Fortunately, or perhaps unfortunately, hard facts prevailed over American war lust. The American navy had 3 battleships. The British had 50. If only Washington had gone to war with Great Britain over a British boundary dispute with Venezuela. The total destruction of the American navy and coastal cities might have taught Americans a lesson and made the population less lustful for war and more suspicious of Washington's war lies: the Gulf of Tonkin, Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction, Iranian nukes, Assad's use of chemical weapons, Russian invasion of Crimea, etc.

Roosevelt and Lodge searched for a weaker adversary than the British navy and settled on Spain.

But how to bring about a war with a declining and tired 400-year old empire far removed from American interests?

Hearst, desperate to sell newspapers, knew what to do. He hired the artist, Frederic Remington, a painter and sculptor much worshipped by American conservatives today.

Remington provided a drawing, filling half of the front page of Hearst's New York Journal, of a comely nude young woman surrounded by sinister Spaniards.

Hearst alleged that three lady passengers on the US mail steamer Olivette were strip-searched in the Harbor of Havana, Cuba, by leering Spanish males.

America had a rare moment of rational thought and philosophical reflection during the brief period of its Founding Fathers. Ever since America has been a country of pulp romances and court histories written as "chivalric derring-do." Hearst asked where were the knightly American males who would rescue womankind from these indignities at the hands of cruel, wanton, Spaniards.

Hearst repeated the story with Evangelina Cisneros, "a beautiful young woman from the gentlest of families." In Hearst's story Evangelina went to the Island of Pines to beg for her elderly father's release from the cruel Spaniards. As she resisted the sexual advances of the leering Spanish prison commander, she was thrown into a squalid prison for prostitutes.

Having created his heroine, Hearst rushed to rescue her. Hearst hired the son of a Confederate cavalry colonel, Karl Decker, to rescue the fair lady. Thousands of words were printed to describe Decker's daring rescue, but what really happened is that Hearst bribed the Spanish guards to let her go from her comfortable hotel room. Having freed "one Cuban girl," Hearst wanted to know "when shall we free Cuba."

Teddy Roosevelt wanted to be the star of the event. Senator Lodge and the American newsman Richard Harding Davis made it so. Teddy charging up the hill, leading the Rough Riders, not urging from behind, defeated the Spanish all by himself and won the war.

What did it mean for the Cubans, a mixed and varied peoples, who had been fighting the Spanish for independence for years before self-righteous, self-serving Americans saw the opportunity to advance their interests and careers?

For Cubans, it meant swapping one master for another.

General William Shafter, the American in charge of the invasion force, declared: "Why these people [Cubans] are no more fit for self-government than gunpowder is for hell!"

Calixto Garcia, who had been fighting for thirty years for Cuba's liberation from Spain, was not allowed to be present when Spain surrendered Cuba. It was purely an American show devoid of the revolutionaries in whose name the war had been fought.

Roosevelt wrote home that the Cubans had fought badly and were not responsible for their liberation from Spain. It was Teddy and his Rough Riders who brought freedom to Cuba. The Teller Amendment passed by Congress in 1898 guaranteeing independence to Cuba was

superseded by the Platt Amendment of 1901. The Platt Amendment gave Washington the right to intervene in Cuba whenever Washington pleased.

It finally dawned on Cubans that “civilization,” a word used by Americans, meant “denying the darker races the power to govern.” In 1908 Cubans who had fought against Spain formed an independent political party. They were massacred by the thousands by the Cuban government now more sensitive to pleasing Washington than to the voice of its own people.

The story of American intervention is the same everywhere. American intervention has never benefited any peoples except those allied with Washington and American corporations.

Hearst’s rival in yellow journalism was Joseph Pulitzer, whose name ended up on a prestigious journalism award. Today the entire US print and TV media engage in the yellow journalism of the Hearst/Pulitzer era. Yellow journalism has helped to keep America in wars as nonsensical as the Spanish-American war ever since the 21st century began. The neoconservatives have resurrected Lodge’s “Large Policy” of American imperialism justified by the doctrine of American exceptionalism.

If Americans were to read three history books, they could free themselves from their self-righteous delusions that endanger all life on earth. Those books are: A People’s History Of The United States by Howard Zinn, The Untold History of the United States by Oliver Stone and Peter Kuznick, and The War Lovers by Evan Thomas.

No one who reads one of these books will ever again believe that the US government in Washington is the “light unto the world,” the “exceptional and indispensable” government that brings “freedom and democracy” to the conquered provinces of the American Empire.

Washington is the home of warmongering self-interested parties that have no concept of compassion or justice and serve only their own power and enrichment. Americans are as indifferent to the populations that their government bombs as Teddy Roosevelt was to the prospect of his own country’s coastal cities being bombarded. As Russia’s President Putin reminded the world on March 18, 2014, the US prefers the rule of the gun to international law.

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